Theresa Phan, MD: Impacting many patients through policy change

MAR 13, 2020

Staff News Writer
The AMA “Members Move Medicine” series profiles a wide variety of doctors, offering a glimpse into the passions of women and men navigating new courses in American medicine.

On the move with: AMA member Myphuong Theresa Phan, MD (@resamtp), who goes by Theresa, is a family medicine resident at the University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School Family Medicine Residency. Dr. Phan is also the vice speaker of the AMA Resident and Fellow Section.

AMA member since: 2013.

What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine: For me, there was never a seminal moment that crystalized my decision to pursue a career in medicine. It started as the hopes and dreams of my parents. Then it was all about “Doogie Howser, MD,” a kid that was a doctor and was respected by his colleagues.

After that, I really started thinking seriously about it at the tail end of middle school. Whenever I got asked, I just saw myself in the white coat and wearing a stethoscope listening to heart signs. It felt important and it seemed like a worthwhile noble profession to pursue. It was a calling that started off as a small simmer until it became the only thing I wanted to do.

How I move medicine: Advocacy. I think that it’s important to be involved in advocacy, both in cultivating policy, and highlighting the needs of both my patients and my profession. Having an opinion is a good thing, but I also feel that in order to really affect change, you have to be in the room, sitting at the table, and actively participating to make lasting change. I treat my patients one at a time in the exam room, but I can help many patients by affecting policy change.

Career highlights:

During residency:

- AMA Resident and Fellow Section (RFS) Vice Speaker (2019–present) and Medical Student Section (2015–2017). American Medical Association
- Texas Medical Association (TMA): RFS alternate delegate to the Texas Delegation to the AMA.
- University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School Resident Association President (2019–present). Representing the residents on the Graduation Medical Education Committee (GMEC) of UT Dell Medical School, attending Chief Residents Meetings, and sitting on the Medical Executive Committee of Dell Seton Medical Center as a nonvoting member.
- Graduate Medical Education Committee Representative (2018–2019). Representing the residents on the GMEC of UT Dell Med School.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/about/leadership/theresa-phan-md-impacting-many-patients-through-policy-change
Copyright 1995 - 2021 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.
During medical school: Lubbock Crosby Garza County Medical Society’s M.C. Overton, MD, Physician-In-Training Award (2016-2017) for outstanding efforts in providing better medicine to the community.

**Advice I'd give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine:** If you have an interest in helping people and medicine, then go into health care. It’s such a broad field that there really isn’t one correct path in this day and age. You can go down so many different avenues, from direct patient care to tech to fitness. There is no ONE way to make a difference in health care. We need people who care, so if you are interested, come!

However, health care is about serving patients. It’s not an easy job and salaries are varied among all specialties. If you just want to make money, there are far easier ways to do that and they will take less time than pursuing a career in medicine.

A career in medicine can be a long one and can be hard to get into. I applied six times over a span of eight years before I finally got into medical school and now, here I am, a third-year family medicine resident. I knew this was what I wanted to do, so I was persistent in my pursuit. If you don’t get in the first time and you really want this, try again. There’s no age limit to start a health care career!

**How I give back to the community:** I joined my state medical society and the AMA as a first-year medical student because I knew the importance of advocacy and the use of a unified voice. I’ve held leadership positions in organized medicine and been part of the process in crafting AMA and TMA policy.

Locally, I’ve helped with sports physicals during health fairs and volunteered during local races in the medical tent.

**Aspect of my work that means the most:** On a clinical level, it is being able to really listen to my patients. If I don’t assess well at the start, that only leads to inadequate treatment. I really like taking the time to build rapport and trust with my patients in order to really assess them well. Family medicine allows me to build that relationship over time and allows me to treat my patient on a multifaceted level. I like to see what is said and unsaid.

On an organized medicine level, I’m passionate about parliamentary procedure. I love facilitating discussion between members, allowing all to be heard.
My hope for the future of medicine: As a family medicine physician, my hope for the future of medicine is that all patients have access to good health care. I also hope that the patient-physician relationship is protected and that our patients will have every option available to them to treat whatever ails them.

Visit MembershipMovesMedicine.com to learn more about other AMA members who are relentlessly moving medicine through advocacy, education, patient care and practice innovation, and join or renew today.