AMA leadership discuss important takeaways from the meeting of the AMA Sections

Watch the AMA's daily COVID-19 update, with insights from AMA leaders and experts about the pandemic.

Featured topic and speakers

In today's COVID-19 update, AMA leadership discusses highlights from the recent meetings of the AMA Sections ahead of AMA's Special Meeting of the House of Delegates Nov. 13-17.

Learn more at the AMA COVID-19 resource center.

Speakers

- Susan R. Bailey, MD, president, AMA
- Gerald Harmon, MD, president-elect, AMA
- Russ Kridel, MD, chair, Board of Trustees, AMA

Transcript

Unger: Hello, this is the American Medical Associations COVID-19 update. Today we're sharing highlights from the recent meetings of the AMA sections and important takeaways for physicians during the pandemic. I'm joined today by Dr. Susan Bailey, AMA's president, and an allergist and immunologist in Fort Worth, Texas. Dr. Gerald Harmon, AMA's president elect, and a family medicine specialist in Pawleys Island, South Carolina. And Dr. Russell W. H. Kridel, chair of the AMA board of trustees in Houston, Texas. I'm Todd Unger, AMA's chief experience officer in Chicago.

Dr. Bailey, the meeting this past weekend was a first for the AMA? Can you give us a little background on why and tell us more about it?

Dr. Bailey: The AMA has 11 different sections that students and physicians can participate in from

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students to residents, to women physicians, LGBTQ, international medical graduates. I mean, it's quite a varied list of opportunities to participate. And typically, these sections we'll meet in person, separately, twice a year. They'll have programming and then they'll vote on resolutions to take to the AMA House of Delegates, to discuss policy. Well, obviously with the virtual environment, we had to do that completely differently.

So, we decided to really completely do things anew. We had all of the sections meet virtually together at the beginning of the meeting, and then break out into their individual groups. And we had like 10 concurrent meetings. Six sections had the opportunity to do live policymaking. And it was really just, I think so important because physicians really are desperate to be in touch with each other and really want to feel like they have an opportunity to make a difference, to make their voice heard during the pandemic, even in a virtual environment. So, I thought it was a great success.

**Unger:** Yeah. Back earlier in the pandemic, looking ahead to meetings like this, I don't think we either had the infrastructure or the capability and confidence to do something like that. Can you talk a little bit more about why it meant so much to be able to kind of pull this off?

**Dr. Bailey:** The meeting that we had in June was very, very limited, and many of the sections weren't able to meet at all. And the fact that we were able to offer such rich programming and have really, I think, record attendance in some aspects, I think it was an incredible testament to the value of the AMA as a convening organization, of an umbrella organization to bring everyone together. And as AMA president, I was really incredibly proud of how the students and residents and all the practicing physicians met the challenge and made these meetings, which can be challenging to do, a great success.

**Unger:** Well, Dr. Harmon, was it a success in your eyes?

**Dr. Harmon:** Absolutely, Todd. You heard Dr. Bailey talk about all the wonderful things that occurred and how well the process worked. In the end, we have a parliamentary process that is the foundation of these meetings where we have our sections joining together. And we managed to move to a new platform of workflow environment, and we did really pretty good. We had a record number of attendees. We had almost 180 items of business discussed. We had 18 educational sessions. We had almost 50 prerecorded sessions, really made for efficiency and accuracy in delivering data. We had elections among the sections. We elected 20 positions across four different sections. We had just an impressive plenary session on Saturday morning that was really the highlight of the weekend for us.

I think all of us as AMA leaders realize that AMA has to be the leading voice of scientific evidence, peer-reviewed studies, and the source for support for the profession and for patients in the COVID pandemic. And this type of meeting format just worked well to satisfy that need.

**Unger:** Dr. Kridel, the plenary session that Dr. Harmon just mentioned, can you give us more about
what happened in that and why it was so important?

**Dr. Kridel:** Sure Todd. Well, we had a special plenary session that began with a recorded conversation between Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, and Dr. Jim Madara, AMA's CEO and EVP. And it was all about COVID-19 and what lies ahead for physicians and for medical students. It drew more than 2,300 live attendees and thousands have watched it on YouTube since.

Now of particular interest, Dr. Fauci discussed when to expect a vaccine, how we've gotten better at treating COVID-19, and why death rates are improving, and what we know about the post-COVID syndrome and other topics that physicians really want to know about right now.

You know, at a time when science itself has been undermined by a torrent of misinformation, Dr. Fauci has been unflappable and completely steadfast in his dedication to science, evidence, and data to protect patients as well as physicians during this pandemic. And so, may I say, has the AMA, always putting science before politics, serving to educate the public and physicians about prevention and treatment as science evolves, and also about evidence-based protocols as they are developed.

Well, following the interview, there was a panel of experts from the AMA sections that discuss the AMA's ongoing in the areas of physician wellness, practice sustainability, medical education, advocacy, health equity, and more. And this session, I think exemplified the important work of our AMA, to pull out all stops, to educate our dedicated physicians on the science, and to show also the public on what they can do to prevent the spread of this very, very dangerous, and sometimes lethal virus.

In our sessions, we also discussed what physicians need to carry out their passionate care of patients. You know, our strength has been growing as physicians and as an association, as we work to sustain practice viability, remove the obstacles that interfere with physician/patient relationships, and drive the future of medicine through improved training, education, and innovation, emphasizing at the same time, the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Now, a further interest about Dr. Fauci. You know, we recognized his excellence many, many years before when he was a rising young scientist, with the AMA William Beaumont Award in '92, and then later with AMA's Nathan Davis Award. So, I think that portion, everyone should take a look at, and I hope that everyone will see the full interview on AMA's YouTube channel. And I know you'll find that discussion with Dr. Madara and Dr. Fauci extremely interesting.

**Dr. Madara:** You've been immersed in this pandemic as you have been in others. Are there observations related to what the physicians, whether the physician is in government or outside of government, what the physician's responsibilities and duties should be during
a pandemic? Is it working pretty well, or do you see gaps?

**Dr. Fauci:** No, I think it's working very well. What we all should be very proud of is what our physician population at the local level is doing. People in the towns, the counties, the cities who are in the hospitals, be they local hospitals or big city, tertiary care centers, we're seeing our health care workers, our physicians, our nurses, and other health care providers really putting their lives and their safety at risk continually by taking care of individuals with a disease that has the potential to kill you, and that is highly transmissible. So I think that this is a proud moment for the medical profession.

**Unger:** Dr. Harmon, you moderated the panel, the reaction panel, following the Dr. Fauci, Dr. Madara interview. You know, what were the key points that stuck out to you about the interview or about the responses from the AMA subject matter experts?

**Dr. Harmon:** I tell you that if I had to pick one thing that struck me as a practicing family physician is when Tony Fauci talked about those who are inevitably going to have some hesitancy about taking the vaccine, receiving it, participating in a COVID vaccine program. I can tell you that I've dealt with that problem for decades as a family medicine specialist, and had innumerable patients say, "I'll defer my influenza shot or my flu shot or my children's immunization, because I'm just not sure about it."

And so, they're hesitant. And what Dr. Fauci told us was, don't be judgmental. Take those people at face value, figure out that they're looking for trusted information, they're looking for a confidant that could recommend them the science and the positivity of the vaccine. And I think that's amazing to me that Tony Fauci can tell you that. With all his accolades, he's still very much a person-based doctor. And so that was really important to me to take that away.

**Unger:** Dr. Bailey, anything stick out to you?

**Dr. Bailey:** It was just so refreshing to me to see Dr. Fauci in an interview environment with a peer. He's done a number of interviews with Dr. Howard Bauchner, who's the editor of *JAMA*. And those have been awesome. And to have Dr. Fauci talking to Dr. Madara, who's a leading scientist in his own right, scientist to scientist, colleague to colleague, no gotchas, no political agenda, and just discuss some intricacies of the COVID-19 pandemic and our response, it was just so wonderful to hear. Of course, I think we all realize what a treasure Dr. Fauci is.

And in the panel afterwards, there was such a wonderful demonstration of the breadth and depth of AMA's work across the spectrum, whether it's from advocacy or health equity, medical education, really, really expanded on that initial conversation.

**Unger:** Dr. Bailey, you mentioned upfront, typically these section meetings occur just before the larger meeting of the House of Delegates and more separated because of the virtual nature of this event. When you think about what happened over the weekend, and you think what's happening with
a special meeting in the House of Delegates this coming weekend, how did the work this past weekend help support the work of what's going to come up in the next few days? And what do you hope to accomplish at the upcoming House of Delegates special meeting?

**Dr. Bailey:** A typical AMA meeting has all of the section meetings, the House of Delegates meetings, all of the states and specialty societies meeting virtually, simultaneously. It’s a real juggling act in terms of pulling it all together. But unfortunately, it also pulls individuals in lots of different directions, because there are lots of different things they want to attend.

And having the section meetings the weekend before the House of Delegates meets, enabled everybody to give their undivided attention to section business, to really participate fully, to make their policy, elect their officers. And then we’ll all be able to give our undivided attention to the House of Delegates meeting, where we will deliberate policy. We’ll try to make it as much like a typical House of Delegates in-person meeting where we debate policy on a wide variety of issues.

The schedule will be truncated a bit to try to deal with the limitations of the virtual format, but people will still have input. And I believe separating them out over two different weekends will make each part of them stronger.

**Unger:** Dr. Kridel, anything that you hope to accomplish at the upcoming meeting?

**Dr. Kridel:** Well, yes, Todd. You know, physician practices have been hit hard by this pandemic and they’re struggling to meet the needs of their patients and staff as they confront worsening revenue shortages resulting from deferred visits. And many have closed down at a time when we need more care delivered. 97% of physician practices are financially affected by the pandemic. Practices report 60% average decrease in patient volume, 55% average decrease in revenue since the onset of the pandemic.

So, we as an AMA must do everything we can to support physicians. We have to stop... There’s a proposed 11% cut to physician reimbursement by the government. And if we don’t, there’s going to be a huge manpower shortage and patient care will suffer. And we can’t expect the altruism of physicians alone to keep their offices open in the president’s pending economic disaster.

And so, we really have to be sure that we can get the help the physicians they need, financial. But it’s just not the financial stress on our physicians. It’s also a mental stress, a mental burden of seeing countless patients get very, very sick from the virus and many die.

And so, we have to do something about the accumulated stress of the pandemic on our physicians and other health care workers. And good news is that physicians feel valued when they have a sense of purpose, and that will help carry them through this epidemic. But we need to do as much as we possibly can.
Unger: Dr. Harmon, any final thoughts?

Dr. Harmon: You know, what we just described with our event with our sections and the governing councils and the elections that we occurred in the development of policy, represents the entire spectrum, the entire demographic of physicians in America, from medical students beginning their medical education, to residents and fellows, to young physicians, to academicians teaching them, to research scientists, to elderly, semi-retired physicians, actively practicing, the entire spectrum in ethics and geographic, broad scope there. It’s an incredible Petri dish for innovation, for ideas, for the profession in general, and for health care delivery across the nation.

I look forward to this meeting. I think we’re in the right place. Physicians need to take a leadership role. This is a great opportunity and we’re stepping up to it.

Unger: Well, thank you so much. We'll look forward to the meeting, what they call the House of Medicine and the policy that comes out of the discussions from the House of Delegates. Dr. Kridel, Dr. Bailey, Dr. Harmon, thanks so much for being with us here and wish you the best in the coming weekend with this special meeting. We’ll be back soon with another COVID-19 update. For resources on COVID-19 visit ama-assn.org/covid-19. Thanks for joining us and please take care.

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