AMA president: Physicians face two-front battle on COVID-19

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In remarks following her inauguration as the AMA’s 175th president in June, Susan R. Bailey MD, compared the journey that physicians travel to those of fictional heroes from tales such as “Star Wars” and the Harry Potter book and film series.

Five months later, in her address to AMA’s House of Delegates at the November 2020 AMA Special Meeting, she remained resolute in her praise of the nation’s physicians as they continue fighting a pandemic that is surging in record-high numbers around the country. She also acknowledged the toll COVID-19 has taken on the country, as well as physicians working to beat the virus.

“COVID-19 has brought immense challenges and pain for so many—including our physician community,” said Dr. Bailey, an allergist and immunologist in Fort Worth, Texas. “We have struggled mightily at times.”

Those struggles, Dr. Bailey said, have included many deaths and illness among physicians, a lack of proper equipment to help protect doctors, and a need for financial aid to keep struggling physician practices afloat.

“As we approach the end of 2020, the pandemic feels a little different now,” Dr. Bailey said. “We don’t know if it is the end of the beginning, or the beginning of the end. But we are a bit wiser and a bit tougher than before. We don’t know everything about the journey ahead, but there is plenty we do know.”

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Fighting a historic pandemic is formidable enough. Dr. Bailey said that doing so in concert with battling against misinformation about science and medicine has been a fight physicians shouldn’t have to wage.

“Never again can we allow the politics of division to undermine our ability to deliver the very best care to our patients,” she said. “Never again can we allow anti-science bias and rhetoric to undermine our public health institutions and discredit the work of physicians, scientists and researchers.

“Never again,” she added, “can we allow a campaign of misinformation and disinformation to co-opt conversations around public health and sew divisions that only serve to prolong the suffering of so many. Never again can we allow public health officials to feel the pressure of threats and intimidation simply for doing their jobs.”

**Helping doctors during hard times**

Responding to the pandemic, the AMA has delivered tools, support and resources to help physicians succeed during COVID-19. Among those Dr. Bailey highlighted:

- Pushing the Trump administration to accelerate production for SARS-CoV-2 testing and PPE.
- Establishing a financial lifeline for struggling physician practices, securing tens of billions of dollars in financial support, grants and interest-free loans to infuse practices with much-needed capital to survive this pandemic.
- Continuing as a leading national voice in support of science, evidence and data as the surest path through this pandemic, launching a major public health campaign to encourage everyone, everywhere to #MaskUp.

The AMA has also continued to keep its eye on the ball with its pre-pandemic priorities, such as ensuring all patients have access to affordable and meaningful health insurance coverage, strengthening the public health infrastructure, and working toward alleviating burdens that threaten physicians’ well-being.

“Despite the challenges of this past year—and they have been extraordinary—I continue to believe in the power of organized medicine to fix the persistent problems in our health system,” Dr. Bailey said. “I believe in science and evidence to light our way. And I believe in the strength and resolve of physicians to take on any challenge and rise to any moment. The hero’s journey is our journey. And we are exactly where we are meant to be.”