

As challenges mount, AMA forms section for private practice doctors

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At a time when physicians of all stripes face unprecedented financial strains due to the COVID-19 pandemic, those working in private practice are facing additional challenges. A new AMA survey found physicians averaged a 32% drop in revenue since February, and those such as Milwaukee family doctor Barbara Hummel, MD, have taken an even bigger hit.

Dr. Hummel, an AMA delegate for the Wisconsin Medical Society, recently told *USA Today* that her patient volume has fallen about 50%. “My practice is technically bankrupt, so I’m paying all my expenses out of my personal funds ... using retirement savings,” she said.

Dr. Hummel also is secretary of the AMA Private Practice Physicians Congress, and at the November 2020 AMA Special Meeting delegates voted to make the group a formal section—the AMA Private Practice Physicians Section. The Private Practice Physicians Congress was established as a caucus in 2008.

“Delineated sections allow a voice in the house of medicine for large groups of physicians, who are connected through a unique perspective, but may be underrepresented,” says AMA policy on member component groups.

The AMA sections are interest-based groups that offer members the opportunity to shape AMA policy, increase relevant knowledge and skills and interact with peers with similar interests or backgrounds. Learn more.

Dedicated to advocacy

The AMA House of Delegates’ action will give private practice doctors a “forum for networking, mentoring, advocacy, educational activities and leadership development,” according to an AMA Council on Long Range Planning and Development report that delegates adopted. The section will “be



dedicated to advocacy on private practice physician policy issues, provide leadership development and educational opportunities for medical students and young physicians, and monitor trends and issues that affect private practice.”

Some of those trends were highlighted in the council’s report, such as an AMA benchmark survey finding that less than half of practicing physicians had an ownership stake in their practice and physician owners are now outnumbered by physicians who practice as employees. The findings underscore a trend of shifting ownership across physician practices.

Explore these tips from the AMA on keeping your practice in business during the COVID-19 pandemic.