

How the pandemic is changing the AMA Research Symposium

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, three members discuss the importance of research and the AMA's 18th annual Research Symposium, held virtually Dec. 3-6, featuring research from residents, medical students and international medical graduates.

Learn more at the AMA COVID-19 resource center.

Speakers

- Ricardo Correa, MD, delegate, IMGS Section Governing Council, AMA
- Charlie Lopresto, DO, chair, RFS Committee on Scientific Research, AMA
- John Slunecka, vice chair, MSS Committee on Scientific Issues, AMA

Transcript

Unger: Hello, this is the American Medical Association's COVID-19 Update. Today we're talking about changes to AMA's Research Symposium and the importance of supporting research during the pandemic. I'm joined today by three members of the AMA Research Symposium Advisory Committee, Dr. Ricardo Correa, program director of Endocrinology Fellowship, and the Diversity Director GME at the University of Arizona College of Medicine in Phoenix, Arizona. Dr. Correa is also the delegate of the AMA's IMGs Section Governing Council. Dr. Charlie Lopresto, chair of the AMA Resident and Fellow Section's Committee on Scientific Research and a third-year internal medicine resident in New York, and John Slunecka, a fourth year MD/PhD candidate at the University of South Dakota, Sanford School of Medicine. He currently serves as the vice chair of the AMA Medical Students Section on Scientific Issues and is calling in from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I'm Todd Unger, AMA's chief experience officer in Chicago.

Dr. Correa, we're looking at the 18th annual AMA Research Symposium. It's going to change pretty dramatically for this year. Can you talk about your role in the symposium what we're doing differently?

Dr. Correa: Yes. Thank you so much, Todd, for the invitation and for trying to get an update out of a recent symposium this year. Dr. Krystal Tomei and myself work as an advisory committee member in conjunction with the chair of the Scientific Symposium for the Medical Student Section, the Resident and Fellow Section, the IMG Section and amazing staff from the AMA that has been working for several months to make this happen. So, we really, what we do is oversight the scientific part and also the event in general. So it's very important to mention that our Research Symposium every year, gets more and more interest from our physician community, our medical student community, and it's unique because the expansion that you can get when you present something in our symposium, is greater than any other scientific event in the country.

This year, it will be four days of virtual. We know that because of COVID-19, everything has in virtual, it started on December 3rd and ending on December the 6th. And it will be exposure for medical students, residents, fellows and international medical graduates. This year, we received approximately a thousand abstracts. So, this is a record for the 18 years of the Scientific Symposium that we ever had in the AMA. From that we have different categories, including medical science, including health systems science, basic science, public health, case report, and of course, COVID-19 research that is so important for this year. We have 400 posters that are being presented and from there, 50 that are going to competition. So, it's an amazing activity that I really stimulate every member of AMA to participate.

Dr. Lopresto: I'd also like to add that this year with our virtual format, we're able to accommodate more people. In the traditional poster competition, the posters are hung in a hall setting at a convention center, but this year guests are invited to watch the presentations on our virtual platform, view the posters and check out the different opportunities to network with participants. I'd also like to mention, we have a new voting feature this year that's made possible in the virtual format. So, AMA

members can actually vote for the best research poster that they saw among the 50 entries in the poster competition that Dr. Correa was mentioning. So, once the participants are in the top voted research are collected, they will advance to a final round with judges to compete, to be an overall winner. This is also a new part of our Research Symposium. It's called the AMA Research Challenge, which will be broadcast on January 13th, so save that date.

Unger: Yeah, like so many things in the pandemic, the virtual environment allows us to expand participation. No travel, makes that a lot easier, 60% more folks entered abstracts, that's a lot of people and really rethinking the end game here, which is going to be a great competition, kind of like I call it, America's Got Talent with medical research. We are looking at those five finalists and a really all-star panel of judges to hear their pitches. That'll be on January 13th.

Mr. Slunecka, let's talk about research just in general, and why is it so important during a pandemic?

Slunecka: Well, Todd, thank you for having me. I think one of the major reasons that research is so important is what we've seen so far during this pandemic. The vaccines are coming and without amazing researchers and the resources to do what they do, we would not be in this position. Research is incredibly important for medical students as well. It allows them not only to grow personally through understanding science, which is sort of the bedrock of medicine, but it also allows them to expand their own understandings as well as to improve their ability to apply to residencies. It's one of the remaining areas that students can really separate themselves from the crowd, as you might say.

The role that research plays in medical education has really been hampered by this pandemic. I wouldn't say it has been lost. I think students and researchers and medical professors have been incredibly resilient in the face of the pandemic, but there have simply been opportunities that are lost. Experiments had to be canceled or set back, research mice potentially had to be lost during this pandemic because researchers were not able to enter their labs, or be in groups. And this can be a huge setback, especially for MD/PhDs who have a much shorter time for completing their thesis work. So, if they were removed from the lab for three to four months, that can be a huge setback in terms of rejoining clinical practice for study.

But this symposium offers a huge opportunity for medical students, and residents, and fellows, to share what they have been working on, to network with each other, and to foster collaborations that simply would not be possible through other mediums. We need to come together in order to collaborate. The joke is that a lot of research is done over a beer. You can't come up with some of these ideas without working together and working closely in a free environment to discuss ideas.

Unger: Dr. Correa, can you talk a little bit more about that networking piece and what's included in this event?

Dr. Correa: Yes. So, it's very important, we talk about a lot about research, but networking is so

important for medical students, residents, fellows and faculties. So, when we were live or face to face, we were able to share things, to share our experience, and start collaboration. Right now, we are not able to do that face to face, but there's so many opportunities that the AMA has given us this year to do it. So, we have six round tables that started yesterday with six steps for publication, where Dr. Lopresto and myself participated with a huge amount of people asking questions and all of that. And there will be another more today, tomorrow and Sunday. So, I really stimulate people to continue that, and it's not just the moderators and co-moderators that are there that will have some presentations, but it's also the interaction that all the participants have among them.

You can find in networking... Another person that can collaborate with you and your project. You can find your next job. You can find many, many things. I always mentioned that whenever you go to a medical society activity, you have to dedicate at least 50% of your time for networking, and now AMA is giving you the opportunity to do this via online. So very, very important. There is poster galleries where you can see all the posters, you just logging into your AMA webpage, and you will see it there, but also participate please, in all the round tables that they are selected with topics that people are very, very interested for everybody. And that will give you a lot of experience, and we'll be able to integrate with others.

Unger: Excellent. We talked a little bit about the categories up front. Obviously, this is taking place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that is a new category this year. Dr. Lopresto, do you want to talk a little bit about what you're seeing there, obviously we can't talk about specific entries, but what are you seeing there and why is it so important to get student and resident input on navigating the pandemic?

Dr. Lopresto: So, we've had over 65 submissions to the poster competition portion, and there is a COVID-19 section. I had an opportunity to review some of the submissions so far, and I'm seeing a lot of great work. This sort of piggybacks off of what Mr. Slunecka was saying before, that while there have been some lost opportunities for research during this pandemic, there's also been a lot of new opportunities for research, particularly amongst resident and fellow physicians. Resident and fellows are typically a little bit overworked, maybe we don't have a lot of time for research in our day to day, but this pandemic has offered a renewed interest in research and new opportunities for research.

I can say from my own experience, in my own institution, we are not a robust, large academic medical center. However, we have been participating in several randomized clinical trials because we're located in New York City and had unprecedented access to patients with COVID-19. So, I've seen several of my colleagues doing research for the first time in their careers, and hopefully this pandemic offers them an opportunity to gain interest in research and hopefully produce a career as a physician scientist in their future. So, the submission so far to the Research Symposium, are just a brief snapshot of people's renewed interest in research specifically surrounding COVID-19.

Unger: Mr. Slunecka, anything catching your eye in terms of the entries?

Slunecka: I think that what really catches my eye is the sheer volume of applicants and of submissions that have occurred this year. We were really blown away; I can just speak from my committee that helped to review some of these submissions. It was quite stressful to go through all of these, but what I kept reminding myself about was just that this is what this is all about, right? It's about the sharing of knowledge, the interaction of people. We can move so much farther and do so much more together by sharing our ideas, and our thoughts on these different topics, especially COVID-19, with the pandemic occurring. That this is something that I think is really inspiring.

Unger: Well, Dr. Correa, can you talk about how people can view the symposium now through the 6th?

Dr. Correa: Yes. So, registration is still open until the last day, December 6th, as you mentioned, Todd. Those that are interested, they can access all the galleries and see the amazing posters and amazing presentations that you can see there, but also you can access the round table discussion. And the only thing that you have to do is to go to the AMA website, go to the Research Symposium, and you will have access to all of this. If you have any questions or any problems, just email researchsymposium@ama-assn.org, and then they will answer immediately. More information is coming soon, as Dr. Lopresto mentioned, there will be a challenge that is coming in January 13 at 7:00 p.m. Central time. More coming, that will be an amazing event with very important judges. As you mentioned, it's "the Voice" kind of thing, so it will be very, very interesting to see. So, I hope that all of our AMA members can attend that. So... very fascinated.

Last thing I want to mention is I really want to thank all of the members of the different committees. The members of the scientific committees and the chair of the Medical Student Section, the Resident and Fellow Section, the IMG Section and our amazing staff, Rosa Adams and the rest of the staff, and my co-advisory committee member, Dr. Krystal Tomei, because the work has been great. We have been trying to put this as much as we can, and I think that it's going well, and for the benefit of our AMA, we are an advocacy organization, but we also care about science and we are demonstrating that this year.

Unger: Well, I'm so excited about what you've created. Thank you to the three of you, Dr. Correa, Dr. Lopresto and Mr. Slunecka, for sharing your advice perspectives and for all the work that you and your teammates have put into innovating on the Research Symposium. I'll be really excited to see our five finalists emerge on Sunday, and I'll look forward to the premiere of the Research Symposium Challenge on January 13th, which will take place on both AMA's YouTube and Facebook channels. Thanks for joining us today. We'll be back with another COVID-19 update soon, and the meantime, take care.



Slunecka: Thank you.

Dr. Correa: Thank you so much.

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