How this medical student helps patients through her advocacy

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Like many people in health care, Brittany Ikwuagwu became interested in medicine because she wanted to help people. She had visions of helping patients individually, but as she discovered more about advocacy, she realized she could further her own reach.

“As a physician, we learn we get to help people one-on-one, patient to patient,” Ikwuagwu said. “But what I’ve learned is that through advocacy, I can elevate that from an individual level to a population level.”

Ikwuagwu is the AMA Government Relations Advocacy Fellow (GRAF), and in that capacity serves as a full-time member of the AMA’s federal advocacy team. In a recent episode of “AMA Moving Medicine,” Ikwuagwu talked about her responsibilities and the impact medical students can have through advocacy.

An advocate for medicine’s future

In her role as GRAF, Ikwuagwu reports to the AMA’s director of the Division of Legislative Counsel and the director of the AMA Medical Student Section (AMA-MSS). She is taking a year off from medical school in order to focus on educating medical students, residents, and young physician AMA members about issues in public health and health policy.

Ikwuagwu is a pursuing an MD-MPH dual degree at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston and is just a few months into her one-year term as GRAF. She said COVID-19 has underscored the importance of this new role.

“Because of the pandemic, the entire medical community has had to pivot into this new normal that we find ourselves in,” said Ikwuagwu, who plans to specialize in obstetrics and gynecology and is on Twitter @Britt_Ikwuagwu.
Ikwuagwu’s advocacy interests reflect that pivot. Her focus is on telehealth and achieving health equity, although she is also looking to address maternal health, Medicare payment cuts, and graduate medical education.

Medical students’ outsized impact

Ikwuagwu honed her interest in advocacy as a member of the AMA-MSS, which is part of the AMA House of Delegates—the legislative and policymaking body of the AMA. State medical associations and national medical specialty societies also are represented.

“I know us as medical students feel that [because] we’re at the beginning of our medical careers, we’re at the bottom of the proverbial totem pole, but we can have really big impacts,” she said. “I’ve seen that firsthand. The work that we do can really be amplified.”

Learn more about other AMA medical student leadership opportunities.

Ikwuagwu said her time working in the AMA-MSS is helping develop her leadership skills and giving her professional development opportunities not possible in medical school. She hopes more of her colleagues get involved as well.

“We have the power now as medical students to impact not only our future patients’ lives, but impact our future lives as either resident physicians or as practicing attending physicians ourselves,” Ikwuagwu said. “We can help make decisions and policies that will help those in the future.”

“AMA Moving Medicine” highlights innovation and the emerging issues that impact physicians and public health today. You can catch every episode by subscribing to the AMA’s YouTube channel or the audio-only podcast version, which also features educational presentations and in-depth discussions.