

How the right strategy will drive medicine in 2022 and beyond

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What if the pandemic had taken place in the year 2000 instead of 2020? The mRNA vaccines wouldn't have been ready. There was no Zoom or Microsoft Teams or cloud software providers such as Amazon.

Similar to biosciences and other services, the AMA has evolved—and improved—with time, adjusting its portfolio to make it more actionable and balanced. After 10 straight years of growth in membership, “we have tremendous growth and engagement over our various channels. This, I think, indicates the amount of trust that physicians have in the AMA,” said the organization’s executive vice president and CEO James L. Madara, MD.

This year, the AMA will continue to stand for science and evidence, shifting the conversation away from conspiracy theories to facts, Dr. Madara said during a recent episode of “AMA Moving Medicine.”

Where huge gains can happen

Dr. Madara said 2022 presents an opportunity to advance the AMA’s strategic framework on chronic disease management, improving patient access to physicians, and training doctors for the 21st century. Whether it’s a pandemic or any other type of health crisis, “it’s really important that we take care of chronic disease,” which accounts for 90% of the \$4 trillion the United States spends annually on health care, he said.

Making spaces around physicians and patients less dysfunctional to increase efficiency, and training physicians to work in the 21st century—not the 20th—are other important goals.

“Regardless of what health care system we end up with midcentury, or what crisis we encounter, if we don’t have those three things in better shape, we’re not going to work well as a health care system,” noted Dr. Madara.

Tackling misinformation

As it has since the pandemic was declared in the spring of 2020, COVID-19 drove medical headlines last year, spanning vaccine development, misinformation and vaccine hesitancy, hospitalizations, and deaths. Physicians play a critical role as experts in medicine and health to guide the public away from conspiracy theories and other false information, he stressed.

“Misinformation in the context of a pandemic kills people,” Dr. Madara said. “And we have to be certain we lift and elevate the voices of physicians and scientists in this realm so that we can get the right information to folks.”

This means connecting with Congress, with large population groups and most importantly, the individual patient, he added.

Dr. Madara also addressed ongoing efforts to address health inequities, as reflected in the work of the AMA Center for Health Equity, as well as the West Side United partnership project, through which the AMA is seeking to promote health and well-being in an economically and socially marginalized part of Chicago with poor life expectancy.

“Imagine that we want uniform quality and uniform safety in our population. In the absence of equity, that's impossible to get. This has been a really important effort for us,” Dr. Madara said.

Progress on telehealth, burnout

The AMA continues its push to measure and mitigate physician burnout and advance telehealth. One innovation predicts the savings a health care institution would achieve by decreasing burnout.

Several digital innovations are also in development through Health2047 Inc., the AMA innovation subsidiary. The AMA was instrumental in working with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to loosen restrictions on telehealth payment and regulations during the public health emergency.

“With the expanded use of telemedicine, we are arguing for the flexibility extension along these lines,” Dr. Madara said.

“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.