

Tomorrow's doctors can help shape today's health care policy

FEB 2, 2022

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Medical students are, of course, the future of medicine. But with events such as the 2022 AMA Medical Student Advocacy Conference, it is apparent that they are also medicine's present.

The conference offers medical students the chance to learn about the legislative process, brush up on how to be an effective advocate for issues important to patients and physicians, and get face time with members of Congress and their aides. The conference, held virtually due to the pandemic, takes place March 3–4. Registration is free to AMA members.

Another chance for students to get involved in advocacy issues, the AMA Medical Student Section (AMA-MSS) will hold its Physicians of the Future Summit Feb. 5, 2022. The summit provides educational programs and further discussion on policy development relevant to each region and its membership.

Learning the ropes

To effect change, students need to understand how the legislative process works. To do that, the Medical Student Advocacy Conference offers numerous educational sessions hosted by seasoned D.C. veterans, most of whom work for the AMA.

Alec Calac is an AMA member and MD-PhD student at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine and Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science. He attended the virtual medical student conference last year. Calac found the guidance from the AMA's advocacy experts to be a helpful table-setter.

"The AMA is one of the more structured platforms for medical students, with peer networking and technical support," Calac said. "We have seasoned, experienced legislative staff who work on these issues day in and day out who talk about what we should and shouldn't do. That's so helpful—when

people make themselves and their expertise available to you.”

Learn more with the AMA’s Todd Askew about why 2022 is the year reform Medicare pay and boost telehealth.

Issues that matter

The conference will focus on three issues determined by AMA Advocacy—prior authorization, Medicare payment reform and telemedicine. Last year, telehealth also was on the agenda, as were the issues of maternal mortality and research on medical cannabis.

“You get to put your passions in action,” said Calac, of the Pauma Band of Luiseño Indians. “For maternal mortality, I was talking about the impact it has had on Indigenous women. For telehealth, it is bridging the digital divide for some of our most marginalized communities, especially tribal reservations. ... It shouldn’t take a pandemic to get Wi-Fi.”

Medical students who attend will be briefed on the top-agenda issues and will then meet with members of Congress and their staff members about them. Students are separated into teams and speak with lawmakers from their region.

“It was empowering,” said Leslie Gailloud, a fourth-year student at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. “It was nice to be given the bandwidth to say why we felt these issues were important. At the time I was nearing the end of my third year. I was able to talk about things I was seeing during my rotations.

“It’s important for students to get involved in something that goes beyond seeing patients,” she added. “Being involved with the AMA has really benefited me personally. You feel like you are a part of something larger.”

Sign up for the AMA Advocacy Update to get exclusive advocacy news and information on key national and state issues impacting physicians, patients and the health care environment.