In congressional visits, medical students will target big issues

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Medical students will shape the future of medicine, and as evidenced by their plan for the 2022 AMA Medical Student Advocacy Conference, it is apparent that they have a few key issues in their sights.

The conference offers medical students the chance to learn about the legislative process, sharpen their public health advocacy skills 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.

Here’s a look at the key issues the medical students will focus on and why they are important, with insight from Brittany Ikwuagwu, the AMA Government Relations Advocacy Fellow, who is pursuing an MD-MPH dual degree at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

Find out more about how Ikwuagwu helps patients through her advocacy.

Telehealth polices to ensure high-quality care

The pandemic has accelerated the rapid advancement of telehealth, made possible by the swift implementation by physicians and other health care professionals and action by state and federal lawmakers to adopt policies expanding coverage, payment, and access to telehealth.

Over the past two years, the AMA has studied this changing landscape, including partnering with other organizations to perform multiple surveys and research projects designed to help stakeholders understand the use and effectiveness of care provided via telehealth.
Students will continue advocating access to quality telehealth services for patients from all backgrounds, including those with disabilities, chronic conditions, and mental health care needs.

“We’re entering the third year of a global pandemic, and it has really shown how important these services are for providing safe and effective care to so many of our patient populations,” Ikwuagwu said.

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

**Prior authorization reform**

Medical students are rooted in the principle of patient-centered care and prior authorization reform, Ikwuagwu said, is at the heart of that.

Prior authorization is a cost-control process requiring physicians and other health professionals to qualify for payment by obtaining approval from health insurers before performing a service. The AMA has long held that prior authorization is overused and existing processes present significant administrative and clinical concerns.

“These measures can get in the way of our physicians giving clinically necessary interventions because of prior authorizations,” Ikwuagwu said. “All the stories of patients unnecessarily waiting because of prior authorizations for treatments and medications are discouraging. We want to fix that to make sure our patients get what they need.”

Find out how to get involved in advocacy work as a medical student.

**Creating a more stable Medicare system**

The continued instability and unpredictability of the Medicare physician payment system remains a key policy concern that medical students hope to address with lawmakers. Students plan to speak with lawmakers to oppose potential payment cuts that could result in a significant decrease in Medicare payments to physician practices.

While these issues collectively might seem lofty for medical students to tackle, Ikwuagwu said that their unified voice is a powerful one.
“This conference is really about letting all medical students know that our voices can be loud when we stand together,” she said. “At the beginning of our career we may be at the bottom of the ladder, but this conference shows the power we have when we do stand together to make our voices heard.

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