What you need to know to get started as a medical student leader

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Medical students have a place in the power structure of the house of medicine through the AMA. That was made apparent during a recent session at the 2022 AMA Medical Student Advocacy Conference that featured two AMA members who made their mark as advocates in the AMA Medical Student Section.

During the session, AMA members Swetha Maddipudi, a fourth-year medical student, and Pauline Huynh, MD, a first-year resident, spoke of their experiences with the section and how it shaped them as leaders. Here are their insights for medical students hoping to hone their abilities as leaders.

Leadership begins with passion

There’s a certain calling to leadership that goes beyond the academic, both Maddipudi and Dr. Huynh agreed.

“I’m at the tail end of my time in med school and as I reflect, I realize I’ve spent so much time working with organized medicine,” Maddipudi said.

Over her time working with the section, she worked on issues such as treating gun violence as a public health crisis and trauma-informed care for children.

“All of it started with my mentor saying, ‘Hey, you seem to like policy work and advocacy work. The AMA is something you should be looking at,’” said Maddipudi, who will begin family medicine residency training this summer. “My chapter was where it all started for me.”

Learn more about AMA medical student leadership opportunities.
Leaders find other leaders

Medical school can often be about textbooks and tests. Advocacy work is a break from that, Dr. Huynh found.

She spoke of how eye-opening her first AMA meeting was in 2017.

“For me, it was the people that kept me coming back,” said Dr. Huynh, a head-and-neck surgery resident at Kaiser Permanente Oakland Medical Center. “We have all been in a med school environment that can be very test-focused or very study-focused. In 2017, there were a lot of public health concerns about defunding of certain institutions. ... There were like-minded individuals [at that meeting] who said we could do something” to protect patients.

Attending that meeting “left me feeling like there is something beyond my textbook or my exam or the one patient I may see that day to practice a physical exam on,” Dr. Huynh said.

Catch up on the medical student leadership 101.

Residency programs value leadership

The next generation of physicians needs voices in leadership roles. Maddipudi said her AMA experiences came up frequently in residency interviews.

“All of my AMA involvement was well received,” she said. “Pretty much in every interview, my advocacy work or my AMA work specifically was brought up in the context of how it has shaped the way I want to practice or how it has shaped my career choice. Given the events of the past few years, a lot of interviewers are realizing how important advocacy is within our communities.”

The AMA Medical Student Leadership Learning Series offers practical education to help medical students lead effectively. These 20-minute, interactive modules offer advice, realistic scenarios and printable resources to help medical students become skilled in core competencies of leadership. This series is an AMA members-only resource.

Taking the plunge
Whether it’s with the AMA or another organization, find the advocacy or leadership opportunity that resonates with you and pursue it.

“There’s an abundance of opportunities,” Maddipudi said. “Pick the ones that make your heart sing and that you are excited about. There’s no need to say yes to things that aren’t exciting. You should enjoy the things that you are doing and there will be plenty of them.”

Find out how, for medical students, leadership and collaboration go hand in hand.