

SPS member profile: Andrew W. Gurman, MD



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May 2022 member spotlight

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Former President, American Medical Association 2016-2017

Pennsylvania Medical Association (AMA Delegate Member 1996-2007)

Speaker, Pennsylvania Medical Society 2002-2007

Location: Altoona, Pennsylvania

Specialty: Hand Surgery (Orthopaedic Surgery)

Q: How has the infectious disease outbreak affected you, both physically and emotionally, and what would you suggest to help other senior physicians cope?

A: I had not closed my practice during my presidency, but I kept it much slower. I felt that it was important to have the gravitas of still being a practicing physician when I spoke to other doctors, to legislators, or to the public. I came to an interesting revelation during the last six months of my immediate Past President year. I realized that I had never enjoyed my practice more. The slower pace allowed me to spend more time with my patients, and the presidential stipend relieved me of any financial pressure for the practice to produce. It was tremendously gratifying to be able to explain to patients what was going on with them, and to explore options for treatment.

In many instances, I would see someone who had been cared for elsewhere, and they would tell me that in one visit, I had explained more to them than the practice who had been caring for them for a year. I use the word “practice” purposefully, since in many instances, the physician was absent from most of the encounters. I enjoyed it so much, that I decided to reclassify my practice as my beloved hobby, and to continue to work at the same pace. This is an opportunity not available to most physicians.

I am at a point in my life where I don’t need to work, but I am really good at this, I love doing it, so I will continue to practice my beloved hobby as long as I am physically and mentally able to do so. Remember, hand surgeons sit down when we examine people, and we sit down when we operate, so I may be able to do this for a long time. I certainly hope so. I was hoping to travel more, but the pandemic has prevented that. I hope to be able to take a river cruise just before the Annual meeting.

Q: What is the most important leadership lesson you have learned and how has it impacted your career in organized medicine?

A: I think there are two important lessons I have learned, and I think that the common theme is service.

The first is a quote: “We must become the leaders we are waiting for.” There is some discrepancy about the origin, but it says to me that if there is something you think needs to be done, you have to try to do it or cause it to be done.

The second is the importance of small gestures: a hand-written note, a phone call, picking up a piece of paper on the floor of a hotel lobby so that someone else doesn’t slip and fall on it. I have always enjoyed connection, and these little things help me feel good about my interaction with other people. When I was AMA President, when a complaint came in, I would sometimes call the doctor and dialogue with them. It was sometimes difficult to get them to believe that the president of the AMA was

actually calling them, but they were appreciative of the outreach.

Q: What do you miss most about serving as Speaker of the AMA's House of Delegates?

A: When I became Vice Speaker of the AMA House, I tried my utmost to convey to people that I was there to facilitate their business, and that there was no personal agenda. I was just in love with the process, and I wanted to share that joy with them. I think to a certain extent I succeeded in that. Certainly, having Dr. Jerry Lazarus and Dr. Susan Bailey as partners in crime helped a lot, since they felt the same way. I miss that interaction. I also miss the tremendous preparation that went in to running a meeting. We would go over all of the resolutions, the amendments if we had them, and map out how we would handle different scenarios if they came up. To the House, it probably looked effortless, at least I hope it did, but there was a lot of prep work that was done. It was tremendously gratifying when it came off well. Finally, I guess I just miss the fellowship of having a relationship with everyone in the House. It was great fun!

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