

AMA Research Challenge open for abstract submissions with Sanjay Desai, MD

AMA's Moving Medicine video series amplifies physician voices and highlights developments and achievements throughout medicine.

Featured topic and speakers

In today's episode of Moving Medicine, AMA Chief Experience Officer Todd Unger discusses the importance of research and how medical students, residents and international medical graduates can get involved in the AMA Research Challenge with Sanjay Desai, MD, the AMA's chief academic officer and group vice president of medical education.

The AMA Research Challenge is the largest national, multi-specialty research event for medical students, residents and fellows, and international medical graduates. Once again, Laurel Road is sponsoring a grand prize of \$10,000 for the winner of the AMA Research Challenge.

Learn more information on the AMA Research Challenge.

Speaker

- Sanjay Desai, MD, chief academic officer and group vice president of medical education, AMA

Transcript

Unger: Hello. This is the American Medical Association's Moving Medicine video and podcast. Today I'm joined by Dr. Sanjay Desai, the AMA's chief academic officer and group vice president of medical education in Chicago. We're going to discuss the importance of research, and how medical students and residents can get involved in this year's AMA Research Challenge.

I'm Todd Unger, AMA's chief experience officer in Chicago. Dr. Desai, it's great to see you again. You know what, I'll bet a lot of people out there don't know that the AMA Research Challenge is the largest national multi-specialty research event for medical students, residents, fellows and international medical graduates. And for the second year in a row, it's going to have a \$10,000 grand prize sponsored by Laurel Road.

We know research is vital to medicine, obviously, but why don't we just start by talking about why it's so important for students and residents to integrate research into their medical career? And you're a great person to know the answer to that question.

Dr. Desai: Todd, thank you, and thank you for having me on this. This is an exciting topic to discuss with everyone that's watching. Really, if you think about medicine, research is foundational. It's fundamentally an expression of curiosity, which is why so many of us pursue medicine and the science of medicine. And if we want to propel that curiosity and continue to advance science, then we need to instill this passion for discovery. And the most important time to instill that passion and to expose people and to allow them to enjoy it and learn from it and nurture it is during these most formative years of their training, which is as a student and as a resident.

Unger: Do you think most students arrive in medical school with a knowledge of how one would get involved in research, or that it is a critical thing to add to your experience, so to speak?

Dr. Desai: Yeah. I think like everything else, Todd, there is a bell curve distribution of exposure to research when people enter medical school. There are some that have dedicated years and years to, and even taken time during college or after college to pursue it in a dedicated way, and others that have come up against it but really haven't immersed themselves. And so, I think that the experiences in medical school will be different depending on your background and your investment in research before.

And I think actually I would say that it's probably intimidating for some that haven't spent as much time before medical school to pursue it. But I would say, everyone, this is your opportunity to learn more about it and to really get meaningful experiences. And the most important thing is to seek out mentors. Medical schools have no shortage of research mentors that you could talk with and learn from and hopefully engage with in a way that would advance research and science.

And I think the other important thing, Todd, is for anyone that's seeking to do research in medical school, again, it can be intimidating. So, I think the most important thing is to define a goal. Too often I think we believe you have to pursue something that is central to your passion and I don't think that's true. I think an equally important goal would be learning a certain methodology. It would be learning how to ask a question, thinking about how to write something up, meeting a network of researchers. So, there are so many goals that you can accomplish by participating and engaging in research as a medical student, as a resident.

Unger: When someone is new to this, let's say; what is the right way to get that start?

Dr. Desai: Yeah. I think the first thing you have to do, again, is to find a mentor. And the best way to do that is to ask colleagues who are already in that school that are years ahead of you or to talk to advisors. Every student has an advisor. And if you speak to your advisor and get advice and information, it should be an informed decision about who to seek out.

And I think depending on your sophistication and your experience in research, really understanding how to make the best choices with whom you work and on what type of project you work. If you're sophisticated, you probably have enough information and experience to make those decisions independently. But if you're not, you can make mistakes. And I think, again, talking to people that have done this for some time and your advisor's the best place to start, in finding a mentor and in defining your goals.

Unger: Well, I guess on the mentor end of that equation there, why should physicians be actively supporting students and residents as they begin that research career element?

Dr. Desai: Yeah. I think, like everything else that I believe, the practicing physicians and faculty and even residents, if you think about it in relation to medical students are obligated to do, it's to mentor. It's to bring up the next generation of learners and of physicians. It's this obligation to promote this sense of curiosity that we want everyone to have. It's this obligation to nurture a passion for discovery and for asking questions.

When I'm around students, it's amazing. They will ask questions that are far more open and I think even provocative in a good way than people that have been in medicine for years or decades. And I think it's because they're not constrained by assumptions that the rest of us often have, and being around that type of inquisitiveness and that type of excitement, it's inspiring. And I think that all physicians should make it absolutely part of their practice and part of their behavior is to nurture that and bring it up and to support all of those students and residents that are pursuing research.

Unger: And because research is so important and vital, the AMA has been involved in this particular activity for a long time. In fact, originally called The Research Symposium, this event has been around for more than 20 years, believe it or not. But starting in 2020, spurred by the pandemic, it became a virtual event. I'm going to say it benefited from that because it's become much more widespread, many more participants, more fair, a virtual setting and, of course, there's a great program attached to it now.

In late October will be the final event followed by our final show with the top five finalists vying for a \$10,000 grand prize in December. Prior to AMA, you were a residency program director. And if you put that hat back on for a moment, what do you see as the biggest benefits for learners to participate in events like this?

Dr. Desai: Yeah. It was ... I was amazed, Todd, when I joined here and learned about the opportunity and the scale of this research event. I think that we are always, as residency directors, as medical school deans, seeking opportunities for our residents to engage in an audience and in a community beyond the school because that's where they get excited. They get moved by these opportunities, to see the impact and to see the reception of their work at a national level, to hear experts in the field talk about their work and give them feedback on their work. It's captivating. It's motivating. In fact, I think it probably is, for many, the motivation that they need to pursue discovery as part of their careers.

These opportunities, Todd, they're not common. Certainly not common at this scale for residents and for students. And I can say unequivocally that this prize money, this level of prize money is unique. It can literally change the direction of one's career and ambition. And so, I think that this is an amazing opportunity. It allows our students and residents to gain exposure, to learn from one another. It allows them to learn from judges and their peers, and ultimately all of that is just joining a community. Everyone wants to be part of a community and I think this is a wonderful way for us to catalyze that excitement.

Unger: And this first year, since you joined the AMA, you also had a chance to join our dream panel of judges along with Dr. Clyde Yancy and Dr. Vineet Arora. I'm curious, based on that first year of doing this, what was it that you were looking for in a winning entry?

Dr. Desai: Yeah. It was so rewarding to be part of that event, Todd. I think it was, for me, it was humbling and inspiring at the same time. It was affirming for our future, just seeing the type and the quality of research and the ambition that our students and residents have. And I think for me, the challenge that I learned very quickly was not finding a submission that had met the bar of something that we think is outstanding; it's actually selecting amongst the many that were presented to us that were absolutely outstanding which one should win the prize. That's a really difficult decision I learned very quickly.

That's such a difficult decision to make because of the quality of the submissions that we have and the presentations that we heard. In terms of attributes, it's a combination of the topic, the relevance of that topic to what we want to learn today, the rigor with which they pursued their research, and I think absolutely their presentation and communication makes, makes an impact as well. I'm really excited to listen to this year's presentations as well.

Unger: Yeah. When you start out with well over 1,000 entries and you get down to the final five; they were really, really impressive, and I was glad I was not on your end and having to make that tough choice.

The past couple of years, of course, have been very difficult and a time of enormous disruption for everyone, including students and residents, and IMGs. The AMA is now in that recovery mode along with the rest of physician students, residents, really trying to help them recover from everything they've

been through. How do you see this research challenge as being part of that plan?

Dr. Desai: Yeah. Thank you, Todd. I'm very proud of us and this opportunity for us to help the community as we emerge, hopefully continue to emerge from this devastating pandemic. The pandemic's taught us many things, as I think we've talked about in different forms with you.

But I think related to this event, it's showed us the absolute urgency for us to protect the integrity of science. It's an obligation that we cannot relinquish. It also has shown us the absolute need for us to support science and to elevate the voices of physicians and students. And I think this event, Todd, does both of those things. It allows us to showcase the scholarship of our young people that are pursuing medicine. It, at the same time, allows them to speak up and share ideas and share their creativity, and we get to celebrate that through this opportunity with them and for them to celebrate it with each other. And so, I think in that way also allows us to reconnect.

So, hopefully all of these things together generates energy and revitalizes one of the core passions of medicine, which is to pursue science.

Unger: And because of all of those reasons and everything you pointed out earlier, it's so important to get the word out about this magnificent event so we can have as many people as possible participate. For those that are interested in submitting abstracts, where should they go for more information?

Dr. Desai: Yeah. So, all the information, Todd, for this event is ... You can find it on the AMA website at ama-assn.org/researchchallenge. There's a ton of information there on how to submit an abstract, on the timeline of this challenge that's coming in the fall, as well as exciting details about the \$10,000 grand prize that we'll be offering.

So, we're going to be importantly accepting abstracts until midnight Central time on July 12. And we also want to make sure we highlight to everyone, including physicians that are practicing now, that they can get involved also because we have a call for judges. And so, that has the same deadline, midnight on July 12 and that is eligible for CME. So, we really hope you consider participation, either as a student submitting a research proposal or as a faculty volunteering as a judge. So, thank you for your consideration.

Unger: Dr. Desai, thank you so much for helping us get the word out on this important event. And again, July 12, midnight will be the deadline for abstracts. And if you'd like to be a judge and help us along with that too, that's an incredibly important role, same deadline for that. Check out ama-assn.org/researchchallenge for more information. And thank you again to Laurel Road for providing that amazing grand prize of \$10,000.

That wraps up today's episode. Dr. Desai, thanks for being here. We'll be back soon with another Moving Medicine video and podcast. You can find all our videos and podcasts at [ama-](https://ama-assn.org)



assn.org/podcasts. Thanks for joining us and please take care.

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