

Dr. Madara: AMA is pursuing work worthy of its 175-year legacy

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Medicine and society have changed during the 175 years of the AMA's existence, but the Association's role as the vanguard of creating a healthier nation has remained constant, according to AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD.

"While the AMA has so contributed in three different centuries, health care has constantly evolved with new threats, new scientific breakthroughs, new treatments and new technologies," said Dr. Madara, reflecting on the organization's 175th anniversary during a speech to the opening session of the 2022 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago.

"Those advancements have greatly changed how we diagnose, treat and care for our patients," he added. "But it's that last element—caring—that maybe has changed the least. For health care remains intimate and personal. The need for a physician's caring relationship with her patients is timeless." (Read Dr. Madara's speech.)

Power in organizational origins

When the AMA was formed in 1847, one of the key motivators for the Association's creation was a standardization in medical education. At that time, quackery was rampant. The AMA's response was the creation of educational standards and the *AMA Code of Medical Ethics*.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, those tenets of the AMA's creation, served the body of medicine well.

"Physician-led studies revealed how a simple pronation of patients with COVID could ease the need for ventilators," Dr. Madara said. "And physicians played a critical role in pushing back against the quackery and misinformation swirling around the pandemic; instead, we promoted science and the best evidence available. Simply put, the AMA's staying power over 175 years is remarkable."

Over those 175 years, the AMA has kept the sanctity of the patient-physician relationship at the heart of much of its work in the public health sphere. Dr. Madara cited several key public health victories on behalf of physicians and patients that reflect that theme. These include opposition to tobacco and discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS, and support for childhood vaccinations, seatbelts in cars, better patient access to care, stronger funding for childhood health, and a more robust safety net.

“We’re proud of this work, and our legacy suggests the AMA can tackle the challenges of tomorrow as well,” Dr. Madara said. “To maintain our relevance in the future, we simply need to ensure that our work of today is worthy of our legacy.”

Read Dr. Madara’s Leadership Viewpoints column, “Elevating your voice, and medicine, for 175 years and counting.”

Framework for the future

Dr. Madara’s reflections on the AMA’s past achievements, showed the Association’s capability as an agent of societal change for the betterment of public health.

“A generation from now, what will folks say were our most enduring contributions in improving the health of our nation?” Dr. Madara asked as he pondered the AMA’s future role.

One way the AMA can shape tomorrow’s health care is through continuing education in the form of the AMA Ed Hub™, a digital education platform now featuring content from multiple specialty societies and universities. The AMA also is advancing health equity with the In Full Health initiative, which engages industry to advance equity in health care innovation through digital solutions, and catalyzing innovation via the Silicon Valley corporate development enterprise, Health2047, which launched its ninth company this year.

What will it take for the AMA to thrive for another 175 years?

Dr. Madara said the AMA’s work to address three key areas—reshaping medical education, removing obstacles from patient care, and fighting the surge in chronic disease across the country—will help the organization remain strong into the year 2197.

“Nobody knows what our health system will be in another 50 years, let alone another 175,” Dr. Madara said. “But I think we do know that if physicians are not freed and better supported to spend time with

patients, if we do not deal more effectively with the surge of chronic disease, and if we do not precisely educate physicians for the realities of the coming century—if we fail in those efforts—there isn't any model for health care that can work.”

Addressing those challenges is most often and effectively done by policy created in the AMA House of Delegates, meeting in person for the first time since 2019, and through efforts such as the AMA Recovery Plan for America's Physicians.

“That framework for long-term transformation, is a needed compliment to the pressing work of now,” Dr. Madara said. “And it's the diversity of ideas, expertise and experience held within this body and the honest, civil and open debate it inspires that is the wellspring nurturing our future.”