For this medical student, patient advocacy is a family affair

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As the AMA Government Relations Advocacy Fellow (GRAF), Kylee Borger is one of the most influential medical students in organized medicine. The position offers a medical student the opportunity to run point on key advocacy efforts in Washington as well as function as a leader in engaging medical students on issues essential to the nation’s public health.

Borger reflected on the position and its numerous benefits during a recent interview. Here are some of her key takeaways.

Borger, who took time during the 2022 AMA Interim Meeting to do this interview, also will be attending the AMA Medical Student Advocacy Conference, a yearly event for medical student AMA members. Offering training on what it takes to be an effective advocate, meetings with legislators and networking opportunities, the conference takes place March 2–3, 2023. Learn more and register now.

Advocacy is in her blood

Borger’s work in organized medicine is multigenerational, giving her exposure to advocacy at a young age. She grew up going to California Medical Association (CMA) meetings. Her father is a physician and active member.

“I didn't get participate in it, but I got to see how excited everybody was, and how big of an impact this made in lots of people's lives,” said Borger, who is taking a year off from her medical training at California University of Science and Medicine to work as GRAF. “So that put it on my radar—that the AMA and organized medicine is a thing.”

Visit AMA Advocacy in Action to learn about the advocacy priorities the AMA is actively working on.
An evolution of her interest

As an undergrad at New York University Shanghai, Borger did multiple internships at Department of Health and Human Services in both the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration and the Office of Minority Health. Those experiences were determining factors in her decision to pursue a master’s degree in public health.

“Those two experiences fostered the understanding of why public health is so important,” she said. “Because health issues are more systemic, and you need to have that big picture view of what's going on and how to fix it.

“Having to fix those things requires systemic solutions. So that's how I [grew more interested in] the policy part in medicine. As a physician or medical student, you only treat the person in front of you. But a lot of the reasons why they come in is because of these systemic problems. Advocacy and policies are how you address these systemic problems and the AMA is a great avenue for doing this work.”

Get tips to effectively speak with lawmakers as a medical student.

A dual focus

The GRAF position’s scope tends to fall into two buckets, Borger said. “There are a couple of different components of this role,” she said. “One is being involved in supporting advocacy staff. Then that part of the role is really important, because you can start to understand what the AMA as an organization is actually doing, beyond the headlines you might read in the news.

“The other part is supporting the AMA Medical Student Section, and recruiting, and getting medical students from across the country who want to be involved in the AMA. That's very important because we're a membership organization, so we want to represent our members, and that's the whole part of this House of Delegates process.

Learn about three insights that medical students should know in the pursuit of health equity.

The student voice

The GRAF position has reinforced the important role medical students can play in shaping health care policy, Borger said. But getting there are numerous ways to get involved in organized medicine during medical school.
“There’s something for every type of student,” she said. “If you’re really interested in policy writing, the technical aspect of what the AMA is going to say and why we’re going to say it, we have the policy-writing process.

“There are also lots of leadership opportunities in our Medical Student Section. We have standing committees where you can be our subject-matter experts for this section. If you’re really interested in global public health, we have a committee for that. If you’re really interested on minority issues, you have minority issues committee. Or LGBTQ, or legislation and advocacy, and many more. There’s more than a dozen standing committees. Then there’s also leadership opportunities in different geographical areas, or regions as well.

“You do not need to have a strong background in policy or advocacy to get involved or become a member in the AMA. All you need is a passion to improve the health of your patients and the field of medicine.”

Find out why medical students are out to cut telehealth’s red tape.