

**James L. Madara, MD**

**Address to the AMA House of Delegates**

**June 11, 2021**

### **Embedding Health Equity in a Post-COVID World**

Mister Speaker, members of the board, delegates and colleagues ...

We have witnessed, even in the darkest days of this pandemic, the brilliance and resiliency of our fellow physicians.

Time and again, through hardship and setbacks, through surges and lock downs ... against a rising tide of anti-science rhetoric and political grandstanding ... physicians rose to the extraordinary challenge of COVID-19.

Physicians stood tall ... and the AMA stood with them.

Through the struggles of the past year we saw a renewed and vigorous AMA. An AMA that's more nimble ... and more focused.

One that not only gives voice to the urgent needs of physicians in a crisis but, through science and advocacy, provides expertise and support to empower physicians to meet any challenge.

When physicians needed an ally on their side against COVID-19, they turned to the AMA. And the AMA delivered.

We may never in our lifetime see another threat to public health the size, the magnitude and complexity of COVID-19 – let's certainly hope we don't.

But it didn't take a global pandemic for the work of the AMA – for our strategic arcs and accelerators – to resonate with physicians, with medical students, and residents.

I'll share three slides that illustrate how far the AMA has come over the last decade, and that clearly demonstrate our growing influence on both health care and public health.

This year the AMA celebrates 10 years of steady growth among dues-paying members, as shown on this slide.

In terms of raw numbers, AMA dues-paying membership has grown by more than one third since 2011. In fact, the membership increase in 2020 was the greatest year-over-year jump in the last 70 years – that's 7-0, 70 years.

This remarkable feat is a result of a focused strategy to build our reputation and create multiple physician points of engagement across our newly developed digital channels.

And it reflects both a recognition of our success, but also a validation that our strategic

arcs of removing obstacles to patient care ... of driving the future of medicine through improved education, training and innovation ... and of leading the charge to prevent chronic disease ... are right on target.

This is the work the AMA does day-in and day-out; even in a pandemic – to improve both the clinical environment and patient outcomes ... to build practice sustainability ... and to elevate the concerns of our physician community to those who can lend a hand.

These aren't easy lifts. Rather, these involve big, seismic changes to health care that the AMA confronts.

And physicians, by placing their trust and support in us, see the AMA as their powerful ally in patient care.

Slide two highlights the AMA's growing leadership on issues concerning public health.

In a year defined by a once-in-a-lifetime health crisis, the AMA was the leading non-partisan voice in 2020 as measured by our share of voice. We were first among all other associations in health care or public health.

Share of voice is a standard metric factoring in an organization's media exposure.

What these data reveal is that on any given day last year, if a worried parent, business owner, or caregiver turned on the news, or read an article, or scrolled through their social media feeds to better understand this novel virus ... that person was more likely to hear from the AMA than from any other health or public health association.

With daily COVID videos, podcasts, and a robust digital presence online and through AMA News ... AMA's website recorded 20 million unique visitors in 2020 - exceeding the combined totals from the prior two years.

Additionally, online traffic surged 40 percent across The JAMA Network, thanks to an expanded digital presence. The public and physicians also benefited from AMA's COVID-19 Resource Center, which provided insights on COVID diagnosis and treatment, vaccines, and other critical information for physicians to share with their patients.

Slide three shows the core strategy that has performed so well.

Our three strategic arcs (shown in the inner circle), each are propelled by our three shared accelerators (represented in the outer circle).

The accelerators in that outer circle are innovation ... advocacy and equity.

The AMA's historic work on advocacy is well known. You are also familiar with AMA's innovation ecosystem, sculpted over the last decade.

In fact, the AMA was named digital health and innovation Non-profit of the Year for 2020 by an influential group of technology and business leaders.

In addition, CB Insights, which provides market analytics to companies and investors, named their top 27 corporate innovation labs in health care for 2020. Health2047, our independently operating innovation company in Silicon Valley, ranked second among this distinguished group.

A more recent area of concentration – our third accelerator that also touches on all three strategic arcs – is our effort to advance health equity. An effort which, like other elements of the strategic framework, is rooted in policies adopted by this House.

Last month, the AMA released its plan for the health equity accelerator, which lays out five strategies needed to move toward a more equitable health future. These include:

- 1) Embedding equity and racial justice throughout the AMA by the developing anti-racism and equity practices, programming, policies, and culture.
- 2) Building alliances with historically marginalized physicians and other stakeholders.
- 3) Pushing upstream to address determinants of health and understand the root causes of inequities. By focusing upstream, toward the origins of inequities, this work takes us squarely into the public health arena.
- 4) Ensuring that equitable structures and opportunities in innovation are reflected in AMA's efforts to advance digital health.

And...5) Fostering pathways for truth and reflection through honest conversations about AMA's past ... to define and understand how our own policies and practices through history have contributed to the unequal health system that exists today.

Why? Well in order to advance equity, we have to understand how we arrived at this current state.

Just as the accelerators of advocacy and innovation were years in the making, the AMA's strategic plan on equity is the result of two years of preparation led by our Center for Health Equity.

Now ... the AMA is neither first nor alone in dealing with health equity as a core strategic element. Many organizations have worked against inequities and injustices in health care for decades and the AMA has voiced concerns in these areas as well.

But now we are intentional and deeply committed to this work. It is part of our core framework.

Toward this end, our ability to build alliances and to bring partners to the table across health care and other sectors is a strength that we will deploy for this purpose.

Our AMA envisions a nation in which all people live in thriving communities ... with a health system that values them equally and treats them equitably.

We strive for all Americans to have access to meaningful, high-quality, and affordable health care. But in the absence of equity, how can we possibly ensure optimization of access and quality?

Through this plan we will develop and provide physicians the tools, resources and the understanding needed to identify and address inequities in their community of patients.

Now, obviously, change in health care and society won't happen overnight.

It will take a continued effort by many – individuals and organizations - working in coordination and toward the same goal.

The late Peter Drucker, the celebrated business strategist, once said that “management is doing the thing right, but leadership is doing the right thing.”

Our mission “to promote the art and science of medicine and the betterment of public health” ...very clearly defines the “right thing”. And our policies define it with both clarity and more granularity.

Through achievement, share of voice, growing membership, national recognition of work in our three arcs and three accelerators, we further strengthen the AMA’s position of leadership.

But how do we continue to increase our impact?

We do so through the hard work of doing what's right.

Thank you.

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