

**Remarks to the AMA House of Delegates
Annual Meeting 2025**

**James Madara, MD
AMA CEO and EVP**

Saying Goodbye

Dr. Speaker, members of the board, delegates, colleagues and guests ... good evening and thank you for this opportunity to address you – after our 14-year journey together – for one final time as AMA's CEO.

We can all take pride in the mission-related strides the AMA has taken since 2011 ... in our financial strength, and, not incidentally, in our membership growth, which now exceeds 290,000 for the first time in decades.

At last year's Annual Meeting, I announced my intention to step down the end of this month. I rationalized that 12-month lead time as one that would facilitate a smooth search and handoff ... noting how, in this century, the U.S. men's Olympic 4x100 sprint teams were outstanding in composition but routinely lost the gold medal by failing to execute flawless handoffs.

I'm pleased to say our handoff will be a smooth one. The combined Board/House search committee has secured an outstanding successor – **Dr. John Whyte**, who was Chief Medical Officer of WebMd among a host of other experiences – and Dr. Whyte and I have already had time working together. He'll be introduced in a moment by Dr. Michael Suk.

John, I give you my warmest welcome (as well as a burden or two!).

For my final comment, I will, as a way of thanking many for career development, briefly indicate what I think were inputs that helped along the way.

That first input was to have outstanding mentors – from **Dr. Ramzi Cotran**, Chair of Pathology at the Brigham, to **Don Randel**, President of the University of Chicago, and many others, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. But I've found that mentorship is provided not only by those above.

If one recruits folks who report to you that are superior to yourself, mentorship also comes from below. I cannot think of a better example of such inverse mentorship than what I had from the senior management team here at the AMA – I thank them all for the many insights they provided me. The AMA is fortunate to have you.

Mentors were also critical in another way. Observing them I also developed a set of guideposts for navigating difficult decisions. A few of those:

- Always take the high road—seems subjective, but it’s usually clear;
- Don’t mistake a dropped ball by a colleague as a conspiracy; and....
- Life is too short—if you’re not having some fun, you aren’t in the right place.

These are simple principles, but ones that have served me well.

Now, while mentorship and principles are important, so is luck.

For example, in 1991 I was one of four finalists selected by the American Gastroenterological Association for that year’s Physician-Scientist Award. The final selection involved an interview by a panel of scientists. The setting was a first-floor hotel conference room in Washington on a hot spring day, with the window open for ventilation.

The judging panel - five renowned scientists in the field – sat on one side of a table which was draped in a white tablecloth. On the opposite side of the table was a chair for the candidate being interviewed. When it was my turn, shortly into my interview, a squirrel – taking advantage of the open windows, leapt into the room – dashed under the table, weaving between the judge’s feet.

What followed was a chaotic, all-hands effort to herd that squirrel out of the room – the judges and I waving napkins, pulling off the tablecloth, and even thrusting chairs ... like lion tamers.

After substantial effort that poor squirrel was guided back out the window into the D.C. wild. By the time we re-assembled the room, my interview time was over, and the next candidate was invited in.

As luck would have it, I got the award – even though my so-called interview was more akin to an episode of *Bugs Bunny* than to any formal academic discussion. So, take the luck when it comes to you.

Mentorship, support of others, some decision guideposts and a bit of luck – those have been key ingredients of my career. But no source of support has been more important than one’s partner.

I’m especially grateful to my wife, **Vicki**, and other family members ... our son Max’s family, with his spouse Audra, and our grandchildren Owen and Auriiah, all here ... and our daughter Alexis, who remains in New York with her husband Dmitri and their toddler

Aleena and newborn Delila.

The importance of a supportive partner was captured well by **Peter Agre**. Peter is a Nobel Laureate for his work on water channels – or aquaporins. While Dean at University of Chicago, I invited Peter to give our commencement address. At dinner, he told this story:

Peter and his wife, Mary, were driving to Mary's hometown in Minnesota. They stopped for gas. Peter went inside to buy mints. Glancing out toward the pumps, Peter saw Mary engaging in animated conversation with a man having a disheveled appearance.

The man and Mary then shared an embrace before the man drove off. Once back on the road, Peter asked Mary what had happened back there. She explained that man had been her boyfriend throughout high school.

Peter couldn't help but say, "Well, he looked a bit disheveled. Aren't you glad you married me instead?"

To which Mary replied, "Peter, if I had married him, he would have won the Nobel Prize."

That story well captures the power of partner support. And so, extending that sentiment to my own life: Vicki, thank you for your unyielding support, wisdom, and partnership throughout our journey.

And thank you to the AMA for the honor of serving you for the last 14 years.

Thank you.

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