Subject: Advocacy Education Towards a Sustainable Medical Care System

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Referred to: OMSS Reference Committee (, MD, Chair)

INTRODUCTION

At its 2023 Annual Meeting, the Organized Medical Staff Section (OMSS) Assembly referred Resolution 7-A-23, Advocacy Education Towards a Sustainable Medical Care System, for report back by the OMSS Governing Council. Resolution 7-A-23 asked the AMA to:

- Accelerate advocacy efforts via educational actions directed towards the general population, medical students, residents, and fellows;
- Sponsor development of text, oral, and video presentations about the state of health care and the avenues for advocacy suitable for wide dissemination;
- Expand direct to the public advocacy efforts;
- Encourage the American Association of Medical Colleges to add education in advocacy to curricula at its member medical colleges; and
- Encourage residency and fellowship programs to incorporate advocacy education into their programs.

This report outlines the current and historical advocacy initiatives of the AMA, details existing policy and action related to advocacy education at various stages of physician training, and discusses possible areas for enhancing these efforts.

DISCUSSION

Resolution 7-A-23 directs the AMA to take a variety of specific actions to educate medical students, residents/fellows, and patients/the public about advocacy and engage them in advocacy efforts.

AMA ethical opinion 1.2.10, Political Action by Physicians, states that “…physicians have an ethical responsibility to seek change when they believe the requirements of law or policy are contrary to the best interests of patients…” Recognizing this duty, extensive AMA policy addresses education of medical students and residents/fellows on advocacy issues and techniques. For example, AMA policies H-295.953, G-615.103, and G-640.035, among others, states that the AMA will:

- Encourage the state medical associations to work in conjunction with medical schools to implement programs to educate medical students concerning legislative issues facing physicians and medical students;
• Advocate that political science classes which facilitate understanding of the legislative process be offered as an elective option in the medical school curriculum;
• Support and encourage institutional, state, and specialty organizations to offer health policy and advocacy opportunities for medical students, residents, and fellows;
• Encourage and support efforts to educate interested medical students, residents, fellows, and practicing physicians about health policy and assist them in starting or transitioning to careers that involve health policy; and
• Identify successful, innovative and best practices to engage students and residents/fellows in legislative advocacy.

The AMA has actualized this policy by creating multiple learning and engagement opportunities for its members, including:
• AMA Medical Student Advocacy Conference, which provides medical students with advocacy training, access to legislators, and a platform to enact changes in public health policy; and
• AMA Medical Student Section Advocacy in Action Workshop (formerly known as “National Advocacy Week”), which provides medical students with tools to organize events on their local medical school campuses and educate their peers and legislators on critical issues affecting medical students and the profession;
• AMA Government Relations Advocacy Fellowship, which provides medical students with a year-long paid position on the AMA federal advocacy team in Washington, D.C.
• AMA National Advocacy Conference, which allows participants to connect with industry experts, political insiders, and members of Congress about current federal efforts to improve health care and to advocate on crucial health care issues affecting attendees and their patients; and
• AMA State Advocacy Summit, which offers participants an opportunity to share their organizations’ state legislative and regulatory priorities, concerns, strategies and tactics with advocacy leaders from other medical societies; and
• Educational courses available via the AMA Ed Hub (e.g., “Introducing Health Care Policy and Economics”).

AMA policy and action address education and engagement of patients/the public in advocacy efforts to a much lesser extent. For example, AMA policy G-640.020 states the AMA’s belief that “better-informed and more active citizens will result in better legislators, better government, and better health care.” AMA facilitates patient education and engagement in advocacy efforts via its Patient Action Network (PAN), which was established in 2004 and today has more than one million members. PAN accomplishments since 2004 include more than a million petition signatures, 500,000 emails to Congress, 100,000 calls to Congress, and 6 million actions taken on social channels.

As a professional organization, the AMA’s focus on education and engagement of physicians is not surprising. That said, greater involvement of the public in AMA advocacy efforts potentially could make AMA more effective in its advocacy on behalf of patients and the profession. However, any attempt to engage the public must recognize the potential difficulties that can arise from blending the perspectives of physicians and patients.

CONCLUSION
Existing AMA policy and ongoing initiatives clearly address the asks of Resolution 7-A-23 as they relate to education and engagement of medical students and residents/fellows in advocacy, whether via the AMA or through academic institutions or other organizations.

What is not entirely clear, however, is how the AMA can best engage with the community beyond, specifically patients, to better promote the advocacy goals of the AMA. It is not unreasonable to request that AMA carefully consider how to best utilize its existing structures and resources to continue to educate and engage patients as appropriate in its advocacy initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION

Your OMSS Governing Council recommends that the following be adopted in lieu of Resolution 7-A-23, and that the remainder of this report be filed:

1. That our American Medical Association explore innovative opportunities for engaging the public in advocacy on behalf of an improved healthcare environment.