Address to the AMA House of Delegates
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Rediscovering the Happiest Place on Earth

Madam Speaker, members of the Board, esteemed delegates, colleagues, and friends —

Welcome to Orlando!

You know, we're just a few miles from what's famously called "The Happiest Place on Earth."

But I have a question for you.

How many of us would describe the practice of medicine that way today?

We spend too much time navigating administrative requirements and battling insurers. We worry about the financial sustainability of our practices. We see patients struggling to access the care they need, while the cost of care continues to rise.

And at the very moment when science is advancing at an extraordinary pace, we're seeing growing skepticism about scientific evidence and the institutions that produce it.

How did we get here? And more importantly, what are we going to do about it?

I ask those questions not because I'm pessimistic about medicine's future. Quite the opposite.

I believe this is one of the most exciting times in the history of medicine. The opportunities before us are extraordinary, and physicians have an essential role to play in realizing them.

But we cannot assume that the future will simply work itself out.

We have to shape it.

And that is why the work of the AMA, and the work of everyone in this room, matters so much.

When we gathered in Chicago in June, I shared a new strategic vision for the AMA. At its heart is a straightforward idea: We must be the leading and most trusted partner for physicians as they navigate the future of medicine.

And I believe that role has never been more important.

Tonight, I want to talk about how we're putting our strategic priorities into action—and what that means for the future of our profession.

Our first responsibility is to ensure that physicians have a powerful voice in the decisions affecting health care.

For too long, physicians have been asked to do more with less, particularly when it comes to Medicare payment.

Practices face rising costs while payment fails to keep pace. That's not sustainable, and it ultimately threatens patients' access to care.

That's why we are pressuring Congress to pass the bipartisan Patients First Act because meaningful Medicare payment reform is long overdue.

We are advocating for policies that protect our clinical judgement and our ability to choose how we practice – whether it's independently or as part of a large organization.

We're also opposing Medicaid cuts and work requirements that put health coverage at risk for millions of Americans.

My friends, we know what happens when patients lose coverage.

They delay needed care. Chronic conditions go untreated. And preventable problems become medical emergencies.

These consequences extend far beyond individual patients, placing additional pressure on physicians, hospitals and communities already struggling to meet the demand for care.

At a time when so many communities have trouble recruiting and retaining physicians, we must recognize the important contributions of international medical graduates.

They are our colleagues, our partners, and often the physicians caring for patients in communities where access is already limited.

Policies that create unnecessary obstacles to their ability to train and practice medicine risk making an already serious physician workforce shortage even worse.

We are also working to preserve physician leadership of the healthcare team, protect clinical autonomy, and ensure that decisions about patient care and public health remain grounded in evidence.

These aren't abstract policy debates.

They affect what happens in our exam rooms, in our hospitals, and in our communities every day.

Our mission is to promote the art and science of medicine and the betterment of public health.

And that mission carries responsibilities.

It means fighting for access to care – because the most extraordinary medical advances mean little if patients cannot benefit from them.

It means defending the science behind vaccines – especially now when misinformation and distrust is threatening decades of progress in public health.

It means standing up for LGBTQ+ patients - ensuring that they always have access to high-quality, respectful, evidence-based care.

And it means recognizing that diversity **matters**.

Yes, diversity.

We need a physician workforce that draws on the talents, perspectives, and experiences of people from **every** background.

Not because it's politically fashionable.

But because our country is diverse. Our patients are diverse.

And because the future of medicine depends on our ability to attract, train, and retain talented physicians who can meet the needs of the communities we serve.

We have a mission. And we will <u>never</u> walk away from it.

That doesn't mean we won't listen to different perspectives. Or reconsider our approach when the evidence calls for it.

That's what science demands.

But it does mean that when access to care is threatened … when scientific evidence is distorted … or when patients are left behind, the AMA has a **responsibility** to speak up.

We have an <u>obligation</u> to defend public health as social trustees … not just as technical experts.

And you know, I've been thinking …

We need to start placing blame where it belongs.

We need to demand accountability.

And we have a lot of work to do to repair the damage that has already been done.

Fulfilling our mission requires more than advocacy alone.

We need to help physicians succeed in a profession that is becoming increasingly complicated.

That's why we are expanding our work to support physicians throughout their careers, including through our new AMA Career Advancement Collective, which is providing leadership, business, and professional development opportunities.

We are working with health systems and practices to address the organizational conditions that contribute to burnout.

Because physician well-being cannot be solved by simply telling them to become more resilient.

We have to change the **systems** in which we work.

Our strategic plan also focuses on expanding the AMA's role in the national conversation about health.

Our *Health vs. Hype* podcast is helping patients separate evidence from the latest internet trends and fads.

The Internet is the only place where you can practice medicine without a license.

Through our support of the Vaccine Integrity Project, we are helping ensure that physicians and patients have access to trustworthy, evidence-based vaccine guidance.

These efforts reflect something I believe strongly: The physician's voice needs to be heard not only in the exam room, but wherever decisions about health are being made.

And increasingly, those decisions are being influenced by technology.

That brings me to one of the most consequential changes facing our profession – Artificial Intelligence.

AI is advancing at an astonishing pace.

It has enormous potential to improve health care, make information more accessible, reduce administrative burdens, and help physicians deliver better care.

The challenge is to ensure that it actually improves medicine … that it strengthens the patient-physician relationship … and that it helps physicians do what we do best.

That's why physicians must have a leading voice in how these technologies are developed, evaluated and used in patient care.

And we want to hear from you.

Tonight, you're getting a sneak peek at a new AMA initiative: the **Digital Health and AI Expert Network.**

This network will give physicians, residents and medical students a direct way to share their experiences, offer insights and help shape the AMA's work on emerging technologies.

You don't need to be an AI expert. You just need to know what **matters** to physicians and patients.

The QR code on the screen is your opportunity to get involved. I encourage you to scan it and join us in shaping the future of medicine.

Now, as I was thinking about how to describe this moment in medicine, I kept coming back to something surprising.

A Disney movie.

As a parent of young children, I've watched more than my share of Disney movies.

And there's one story that I think is particularly relevant to where we find ourselves today.

Moana.

For those of you who haven't seen it, Moana is a young woman who leaves the familiarity of her island home and ventures into an ocean she doesn't fully understand.

She knows there's something important she needs to accomplish, but the path forward isn't obvious.

The conditions change. There are risks she hasn't anticipated. And she has to learn how to navigate an unfamiliar world.

In the film, that skill is called wayfinding.

It's about understanding the currents, reading the stars, recognizing when conditions are changing … and knowing how to find your way even when the destination isn't visible.

I think that's a useful way to understand what physicians are experiencing today.

In moments like these, we need more than a map based on where we've been.

We need the ability to understand where we're going.

That's the role our AMA **must** play.

And there's another dimension to this analogy that's equally important.

Just as physicians need a trusted partner to help them navigate the future, patients need physicians to help them navigate an increasingly complicated world of medical information.

Today, patients can search online, watch videos, or ask an AI chatbot about almost any health concern.

Some of it is accurate. Some is misleading.

Some of it is simply wrong – and dangerous.

But even when the information is accurate, patients must determine what it means for them.

That's where physicians matter.

We bring clinical judgment, experience, and an understanding of the individual sitting before us.

And perhaps most importantly, we bring something that has always been central to medicine.

A relationship built on trust.

People want answers. But they also want to understand what those answers mean for their own lives.

And it's why I'm particularly excited about a new national campaign we are launching at the AMA.

Some of you may have noticed billboards on your way here from the airport.

They ask a very simple question: **Did You Ask Your Doctor?**

The message to patients is straightforward.

Be curious about your health. Search online. Use chatbots. Ask good questions.

But when it comes to decisions about your health – **Your doctor knows you best.**

And we are bringing that message to where people spend their time.

On YouTube, Google searches and social media.

Yes, on billboards.

Even on buildings and barges.

We have to meet people where they are. And this campaign will do exactly that.

As I look ahead, I don't underestimate the challenges facing our profession.

But I am convinced that we have an extraordinary opportunity to make meaningful progress.

And that brings me back to where I began.

We're meeting near the happiest place on Earth, in a time of enormous challenges and change for medicine.

The lesson I take from Moana is that navigating uncertainty doesn't require us to know exactly what lies ahead.

It requires us to understand the changing environment, stay focused on what matters, and have the confidence to move forward.

Our mission has guided this organization through generations of change.

And it will guide us through the changes ahead.

As I close, I want to leave you with something.

We are in the land of make-believe, so I wanted to have a little fun.

When we are kids, we all want to believe in superheroes.

And the state of medicine today requires a guardian to look after it.

We are the guardian called to this most consequential moment for our patients, and our profession.

The AMA must be an organization that doesn't simply respond to the challenges facing medicine, but helps shape its future.

One that is judged not by how many statements we issue or meetings we hold, but by the difference we make.

The waters ahead may be rough. The challenges may be great.

But we know where we are going.

Together, we won't just prepare for what's next

We will lead the way.

Thank you.

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