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VOLUME 16, ISSUE 1
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2009

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE Join the AMA Now!

Larry D. Weiss, MD JD FAAEM

Recent decisions by the American Medical Association (AMA) reinforce the need for more AAEM members to join "the house of medicine." Despite relatively few emergency physicians who belong to the AMA, the Texas Medical Association and the AMA recently submitted an amicus curiae brief on our behalf in our Texas cases against TeamHealth. They made this decision because the issues in our cases may ultimately affect all physicians. I also firmly believe they provided the amicus brief because they just wanted to do the right thing.

In recent years, the AMA intensely lobbied for tort reform, EMTALA reform and many economic issues that benefit physicians. In 2006, the AMA issued a Board of Trustees (BOT) report on the corporate practice of medicine (CPOM), offering to provide assistance to state medical societies to encourage legislatures to strengthen legislation regarding the lay corporate practice of medicine.

The AMA has steadily increased its efforts to advocate for our patients. Nearly three years before the Institute of Medicine published its book *To Err is Human*, the AMA founded its National Patient Safety Foundation dedicated to decreasing the clinical rate of error. The AMA strongly advocates against the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs. Currently, the AMA has an organized campaign to extend health insurance coverage to all patients.

On many issues regarding physician practice rights, emergency physicians receive a great deal of support from the AMA. As noted above, the AMA currently has a strong interest in the problem of lay corporate control of medical practices. An author of the BOT report on CPOM, AMA President-Elect J. James Rohack, MD, will address this issue at our Scientific Assembly, where he will deliver the keynote address on March 2, 2009.

Specialty societies alone cannot resolve some of medicine's most intractable problems, such as the liability crisis and the CPOM issue. Having the support of physicians from many specialties can help us resolve some of emergency medicine's most important problems. In turn, our role as good citizens in the house of medicine will require us to help resolve problems affecting other specialties.

This will make us all stronger and will allow us to improve the medical care received by all patients.

Currently, AAEM has no seats in the AMA House of Delegates (HOD) because too few of our members belong to the AMA. AAEM attends sessions of the AMA's Specialty and Service Society, but we can only stand in the back of the room and observe HOD deliberations without the right to participate. The time has come for us to mature as a society and take our place in the AMA HOD. The AMA currently has a moratorium on admitting new specialty societies to the HOD until it works out new conditions on participation. In all probability, the modified rules will not change significantly. More AAEM members must join the AMA for us to have a voice in the HOD.

By joining the AMA, you will get the personal satisfaction of directly working with a wide variety of physicians in your county and state. In many localities, we get overlooked because we simply have not been involved. Your membership in the AMA will also give AAEM a voice in the AMA HOD. Help advocate for the medical profession, your specialty and your patients by joining the AMA. You may easily find membership information on their website at www.ama-assn.org.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1
President's Message
- 3
Recognition Given to
Foundation Donors
- 6
Candidate Platform
Statements
- 10
Washington Watch
- 11
AAEM Activities
- 14
AAEM/RSA Activities
- 28
Young Physicians
Section
- 30
Job Bank

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