

AMA's program

for the twenty-first century

J. James Rohack, M.D., John H. Armstrong, M.D., Duane M. Cady, M.D., Edward L. Langston, M.D., Nancy H. Nielsen, M.D., Ph.D., and Donald J. Palmisano, M.D., J.D.

This year marks a milestone in the 158-year history of the American Medical Association. After several years of research and analysis, the AMA is rolling out a series of action programs that will be more responsive to what physicians tell us they need.

Building a more member-centric AMA is both long overdue and well under way. While public approval ratings of the AMA remain high, we are working aggressively to reconnect with America's physicians. The AMA has taken a comprehensive look at its programs, its objectives, and its future to develop a strategy that we believe will best serve America's physicians, as well as the future of organized medicine. Guided by management consulting firm McKinsey and Company, AMA's leaders prioritized the association's activities around the following major goals.

1. **Greater physician involvement in AMA decisions and actions.** The AMA is holding a series of open-forum roundtable discussions in major U.S. cities; it developed a Member Connect survey research program to help it to set its agenda and identify emerging issues for study; and it has expanded its grassroots advocacy efforts to help AMA members to work on important legislation and regulatory actions.

2. **More focused advocacy.** The AMA's 2005 Health Care Advocacy Agenda addresses these symptoms of an ailing health care system:

- **Medical liability reform**—President Bush and leading members of Congress have declared this a national priority. The AMA is aggressively campaigning for reform at both the national and state levels. Texas, Nevada, and Florida have revised their state laws to begin the control of runaway juries in tort cases.

- **Patient safety and clinical quality improvement**—Legislation approved by both houses of Congress last term is being reintroduced. It would deemphasize the “shame and blame game,” and instead concentrate on learning from past mistakes and the prevention of recurring errors.

- **Medicare physician payment reform**—A concerted AMA effort in the face of planned cuts in physician payments—scheduled to last two years—transformed cuts into small increases. But today, the proposed annual cuts of five percent (which would result in 31 percent cumulative cuts by 2012) threaten the future viability of Medicare. On behalf of America's senior citizens and the physicians who provide their care, the AMA is lobbying Congress to reverse the projected penalties to ensure that physicians can care for their senior patients.

- **Expanding care for the uninsured and increasing access to care**—The AMA's campaigns to provide tax credits for the uninsured and to encourage the use of Health Savings Accounts, as well as its other educational and information programs, are showing marked success.

- **Improving public health by promoting healthy lifestyles, and eliminating health disparities**—The AMA's success in battling Big Tobacco is a matter of record. We are committed to waging equally aggressive campaigns against other public health problems that rob patients of their health and escalate health care costs. At the same time, the AMA is working to improve outcomes for minorities, and educate physicians about what they can do to minimize or eliminate minority health disparities. Disparities in the provision of medical care are now on the national agenda.

- **Regulatory relief**—The AMA is vigorously involved

J. James Rohack (AQA, University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, 1980) is chair of the board of trustees of the American Medical Association (AMA).

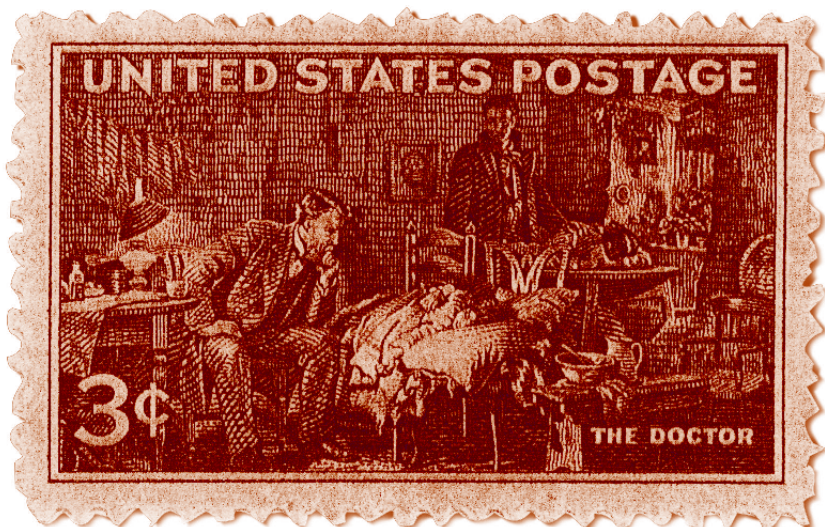
John H. Armstrong (AQA, University of Virginia, 1988) is secretary of the AMA board.

Duane M. Cady (AQA, Loma Linda University, 1959) is chair-elect of the board of trustees of the AMA.

Edward L. Langston (AQA, Indiana University, 1975) is a trustee of the AMA.

Nancy H. Nielsen (AQA, University of Buffalo, 1976) is a speaker of the House of Delegates of the AMA.

Donald J. Palmisano (AQA, Tulane University, 2003) is the immediate past-president of the AMA.



This 3-cent U.S. stamp bearing a reproduction of the famous painting "The Doctor" was issued in 1947 to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the American Medical Association.

Courtesy Jim M'Guinness.

in the never-ending crusade to slash red tape and create physician- and patient-friendly rules and regulations. We are committed to clearing the logjam of unnecessary and sometimes harmful bureaucracy that hinders the practice of medicine and patient care.

- *Managed care reform*—Current antitrust regulations prohibit independent physicians from negotiating with huge managed care organizations. The AMA is working to change those regulations so that physicians have the same bargaining power other professionals enjoy. The AMA also continues its energetic campaigns to block mega-mergers of managed care behemoths, because we believe that patients stand to suffer from over-concentration of economic power.

3. *Improved communication.* Today's AMA must be a critical and far-reaching voice in American health care. Its members therefore want timely, focused, and easy-to-read briefings on the progress of the AMA's national health care agenda. Such briefings should include breaking news and an annual advocacy "scorecard" on the past year's achievements. Through these briefings, we hope to better inform and connect with physicians and our members. Research indicates that more than 50 percent of all physicians and 70 percent of current AMA members strongly support the role medical societies can play in improving the profession and general health care. Health care activists welcome opportunities to help shape and influence health care in this country, and we want to connect with them and urge them to share their activism and efforts for advocacy with our 250,000 members. Improving communication among doctors, particularly those working directly for change, is vital to clarify and coordinate physicians' advocacy efforts, and we want to enlist more physicians to work together with us in addressing these critical issues. The AMA can unite physicians to tackle the tough issues about medicine and health care in this country.

During 2005, the AMA will expand and enhance its coordinated efforts to address each of these critical issues. Our challenge remains to communicate our progress to physicians and the public. America's physicians agree with us that together we are stronger—only together can we truly play an active role in shaping the future of medicine.

As part of this effort to work stronger together, in 2005 we will unveil an entirely new look to the AMA, designed to capture the essence of the organization's ultimate goal, that of being the most influential advocate for U.S. health care. The new brand and our rejuvenated strategic direction will both embrace the AMA's traditional programs and interests and more clearly communicate our focus, and will bring all aspects of organized medicine together to address these.

The AMA historically has used its unique position to unite physicians, leveraging the extraordinary diversity of our profession toward one straightforward, uncompromis-



ing goal: helping doctors help patients. Although some have questioned the AMA's leadership in the past, no one can question its current commitment to renewal and reawakening of the traditions that have made the AMA a vocal advocate for health care in the United States.

The AMA enters the twenty-first century committed to remaining young at heart, to keeping in touch with the profession, and to better embracing younger physicians, minority physicians, and emerging technologies. All this bodes well for the future of the medical profession.

Address correspondence to:

Mr. Mike Lynch
Vice President, External Communications
American Medical Association
515 N. State Street
Chicago, Illinois 60610