



Richard L. Bynny, MD, FACP, displays his AOA certificate in front of the William Root historical cabinet in the AOA national office.

The proudest moment of my career

Richard L. Bynny, MD, FACP

Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society (AOA) has been recognizing, advocating for, and inspiring physicians in teaching, the care of patients, and promotion of health for more than 116 years. AOA aspires for all in the medical profession to be worthy to serve the suffering.

Election to AOA is an honor signifying a lasting commitment to clinical excellence, professionalism, leadership, scholarship, research, and community service. A lifelong honor, membership in the society confers recognition for a physician's dedication to medical professionalism, and the science and art of healing. Membership may be attained throughout one's professional career—as a medical student, resident, fellow, faculty member, alumni, clinician, or distinguished leader in medicine.

Members exemplify excellence and achievement in medicine that includes, but is not limited to, scholastic achievement; demonstrated professionalism; leadership capabilities; adherence to ethical standards; fairness in dealing with colleagues; and a record of service to school and community. Members are recognized as excellent doctors whose knowledge, skills, professional attitude, trustworthiness, demeanor, care of the patient, compassion, empathy, altruism, teamwork, lifelong learning, humility, and responsibility place them in the upper echelon of the medical profession as servant leaders.

More than 4,000 students, residents/fellows, faculty, and alumni are elected each year. Since its founding in 1902, nearly 187,000 members have been elected to the

society. Membership in AOA is a lifelong professional commitment to the mission and values of AOA. AOA expects members to commit to a lifelong professional responsibility of high-quality clinical care, academic achievement, exceptional leadership, outstanding professionalism, and remarkable service. Members serve as clinicians, teachers, role models, mentors, coaches, public servants, and leaders in medicine, their communities of practice, and society.

I will never forget the day in 1964 when I was elected to be a member of AOA—it was the proudest moment of my career. I was a first-generation college graduate with no physician family members or physician friends. The only physician I had met was my pediatrician who I saw about once a year when I was a child.

I was academically successful in high school and was committed to graduating from college. I came from very modest means, and the only way I was able to attend college was to go to a community college as an aspiring first-generation college student. After my first year at community college, I was able to transfer to the University of Southern California on a swimming and water polo athletic scholarship. I majored in history and thought I would get a PhD and become a teacher and professor of history.

However, I postulated that I could be a doctor and care for patients. I had completed the pre-medical requirements and was qualified to apply to medical school. I applied and to my surprise and great celebration, was accepted!

Upon my arrival at the University of Southern California School of Medicine (now the Keck School

of Medicine of USC) I was terrified, certain that I was underprepared and would fail. I believed that all of my fellow students were more qualified and smarter than I was. However, hard work, perseverance, teamwork, diligence, help from some of my fellow students, excellent teachers, faculty, physician mentors, and diverse patients, I received my MD degree in 1964.

It was in my senior year when I was notified that I had been elected to Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society, which was the highest honor I could imagine. Though I had been an All-American athlete during my undergraduate studies, nothing could compare to the pride, gratification, and humility I felt with this award. However, along with those feelings, I knew that with election to AΩA came immense responsibility, commitment, and duty.

Throughout my career, I have always had my framed Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society certificate hanging in my office, and there have been many, many positions I have served in, from residency, to fellowship, to clinical practitioner, to academic positions as executive vice chancellor, executive vice president, chancellor, and now as executive director of AΩA. In each and every office I have proudly displayed my certificate. Often times, it has served as a conversation piece for patients, colleagues, and the general public, and always as a source of great pride.

I explain to those both familiar with AΩA, as well as those who are just learning about the society, the history of William Root, his legacy, and how the AΩA certificate stands for a community of practice representing professionalism, leadership, and ethics in medicine. I explain how AΩA members are dedicated to the care of ALL people, how they support clinical excellence, and how they lead based on service to others with a moral responsibility to provide the highest quality health care for all.

I explain how AΩA members discover and apply new knowledge, teach future physicians, and serve society.

I explain that we are a professional community of practice contributing on myriad levels to the betterment of health care throughout the world. A community of practice that forges a bond of camaraderie and trust that achieves success by working together for a common cause to improve care and health. A community of practice with a goal to inspire each other to create an environment in which great ideas are shared and often brought to fruition. A community of practice based on trust which allows us to work with, and rely on, others to seek advice in making decisions.

Even when the health care system feels chaotic and disorganized, the AΩA community of practice retains

cohesiveness and support through our common mission of recognizing high educational achievement; honoring gifted teaching; encouraging the development of leaders in academia and the community; supporting the ideals of humanism; and promoting service to others. We reflect on why we chose to be doctors, and why we love medicine and caring for patients. We find joy in the intense and intimate essence of the doctor-patient relationship and the bond we have with our patients and each other. We recognize that we have the privilege and responsibility to make a difference in caring for our patients, which can be challenging, but fulfilling, and provides professional satisfaction and enjoyment. We dutifully work to compensate for the businessification of health care, which can adversely affect us, our patients, and their families.

I explain how our life and work as physicians is personally and professionally rewarding with a profound sense of fulfillment. Health care and service to others is the higher cause that binds our community of practice.

I explain that AΩA is committed to improving diversity based on evidence that inclusion of talented individuals from different backgrounds benefits patient care, population health, education, and scientific discovery. I explain how AΩA works to overcome bias throughout our profession, and how AΩA values a diverse, fair, and equitable work and learning environment for all.

I explain that there is a deep personal and professional connection that exists between what we do and why we are doing it. However, there is great risk of a lapse if we no longer realize why we became physicians who are dedicated to being worthy to serve the suffering.

AΩA serves our profession, members, and society as a whole. It emphasizes finding joy in the care of the patient. We strongly encourage all of our members to reach out to their local AΩA Chapter and Councilor and re-engage with their community of practice. If you need help in finding a local Chapter, Councilor, or community of practice with which to connect, please call us at the national office 720-859-4149, or email info@alphaomegalpha.org, and we will be happy to help.

AΩA is committed to excellence and achievement, our patients, our community of practice, a healthy society, medical professionalism, leadership, service, teaching, and scientific discovery and application. “Be worthy to serve the suffering” is our commitment to our profession and the patients we serve.