for Minnesota clinics alone. It needlessly postpones and degrades patient care."

Another event included Rep. Tara Mack (R-Apple Valley), chair of the House Health and Human Services reform committee. Afterward, Mack expressed her interest in working with the MMA on changes to the bill to remove some of the opposition.

The MMA’s push continued in early December with a reception for Sen. Melisa Franzen (DFL-Edina), the author of the Senate bill. MEDPAC, the MMA’s political action committee, continued the campaign with an event with Rep. Matt Dean (R-Dellwood), an influential leader on health care matters at the Capitol.

In addition, the MMA is tapping the Fix PA Now coalition to find patients who are willing to share their stories and testify at the Capitol about how the current process for medication prior authorization is getting in the way of their needed care and is adversely affecting them.

“To make a significant difference, we need patients to tell lawmakers in their own words how the process impacts their lives and that it needs to be fixed now,” Renner says. “They can do this by testifying in legislative hearings, writing letters and emails to their legislators, authoring op-eds for their local paper and agreeing to be featured in newspaper articles on prior auth.”

If you have a patient who has been adversely affected by prior authorization and is willing to tell their story publicly, please email Dan Hauser, dhauser@mnmed.org or Dave Renner, drenner@mnmed.org.

Intractable pain added to list of qualifying conditions for medical cannabis

In early December, Health Commissioner Edward Ehlinger, MD, added intractable pain to the nine qualifying conditions already allowed in the state’s medical cannabis program. Patients certified as having intractable pain will be eligible to receive medical cannabis from the state’s two manufacturers starting August 1, 2016.

In a statement to the media, MMA President Dave Thorson, MD, said: “The MMA remains concerned about the expanded use of medical cannabis, particularly for conditions such as intractable pain that are difficult to objectively certify. Treatment of severe and chronic pain deserves careful consideration and medical cannabis should never be a first-line therapy. Significant questions about the efficacy of medical cannabis remain and we continue to call for additional well-controlled studies. The MMA looks forward to further guidance from the health department regarding how intractable pain will be added to the state’s medical cannabis program, and we will continue to provide education and information to Minnesota physicians who may be interested in participating in the program.” (See “Viewpoint,” p. 28.)

Five MMA members take part in opioid prescribing work group

The Minnesota Department of Human Services’ opioid prescribing work group began meeting in November in an effort to improve prescribing and monitoring the use of these drugs in Minnesota. The group plans to meet through 2017. MMA members on the team include: Chris Johnson, MD, Emergency Physicians Professional Association; Ernest Lampe, MD, Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry; Charles Reznikoff, MD, Hennepin County Medical Center; Jeffrey Schiff, MD, MBA, Minnesota Department of Human Services; and Lindsey Thomas, MD, Hennepin County Medical Examiner’s Office.

The work group is tasked with:
• Recommending protocols that address all phases of the opioid prescribing cycle
• Overseeing development of educational resources and messages for providers about communicating with patients about pain and the use of opioids to treat pain
MMA launches new initiative on reducing health care costs

The MMA is launching a significant new effort focused on health care affordability. The MARCH Campaign (Minnesota Action to Reduce Costs in Healthcare) initially will address three topics: 1) administrative burden and inefficiencies; 2) prescription drug costs; and 3) low-value and unnecessary care. A 15- to 18-member steering committee, which will meet six to eight times in 2016, is being assembled to help guide the campaign’s work.

Minnesotans named to medical license compact commission

Two Minnesotans, including one MMA member, have been appointed to the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact Commission by Gov. Mark Dayton. Minnesota is among 11 states that have enacted the compact, which allows for an accelerated process for eligible physicians to become licensed in multiple states. Dayton named MMA member Jon Thomas, MD, and Ruth Martinez, MA, as representatives from Minnesota. Thomas is an otolaryngologist and chief operating officer of Ear, Nose and Throat Specialty Care of Minnesota and a member of the Minnesota Board of Medical Practice (BMP). Martinez is the BMP’s executive director.

Member featured in book on black women in medicine

MMA member Dionne Hart, MD, is featured in a recently published book highlighting portraits and biographical accounts from more than 100 of the most prominent historical and contemporary black women physicians in the country. Against All Odds: Celebrating Black Women in Medicine is the print companion to the upcoming documentary film, Changing the Face of Medicine.

MMA Foundation event raises nearly $50,000

“Care Where it Counts,” the MMA Foundation’s fall fundraising campaign, welcomed 70 guests and raised nearly $50,000 at events held in Rochester and the Twin Cities. The free gatherings highlighted the foundation’s Physician Loan Forgiveness program and featured an appearance by MMA member Robert Jeske, MD, who practices family medicine in Waseca. Jeske is one of six primary care physicians practicing in a medically underserved community who have received assistance from the Physician Loan Forgiveness program. The MMA
Foundation’s goal is to improve access to care in underserved Minnesota communities and to support medical students through scholarships.

Forum addresses opportunities and challenges for independent practices

Recruiting and retaining physicians. Sustaining a referral base in a consolidated market. Having to meet performance standards with limited resources. Feeling like you have to know everything. Those are among the issues that keep physicians in independent practices awake at night, according to those who attended an MMA-sponsored forum in November. The forum featured Bruce Bagley, MD, MAAFP, a family physician and practice redesign expert with the American Medical Association (AMA), who discussed how physicians can adapt to a changing environment, prevent burnout and utilize the AMA’s STEPS Forward practice improvement program. About 25 physicians attended in person; 15 more attended online.

Medical student section elects 2016 leaders

The MMA Medical Student Section elected its new leaders in December, installing Augustin Joseph, Mayo Medical School, as chair; Erica Sanders, the University of Minnesota Medical School, Twin Cities campus, as vice chair; Stephen Palmquist, the University of Minnesota Medical School, Duluth campus, as delegate; Annabelle Soares, Mayo Medical School, as alternate delegate; and Gretchen Hoff, the University of Minnesota Medical School, Twin Cities campus, as secretary.

Trauma surgeon wins Bolles Bolles-Rogers Award

David J. Dries, MSE, MD, FACS, FCCP, MCCM, a trauma surgeon and critical care specialist at Regions Hospital in St. Paul, received the Charles Bolles Bolles-Rogers Award from the Twin Cities Medical Society Foundation.

On the calendar

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
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<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day at the Capitol</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, St. Paul Downtown</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016 Annual Conference</td>
<td>Sept. 23-24</td>
<td>DoubleTree Park Place Hotel, St. Louis Park</td>
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Check the MMA’s website (www.mnmed.org/events) for more information and to register.