A new way of engaging

In the February issue of Minnesota Medicine, the cover story “New Jobs for New Times” (p. 13) explored some of the roles physicians are playing in today’s health care environment.

Although some of the new titles (total-cost-of-care medical director and medical director of recruitment and retention, to name two) may take some getting used to, I don’t see these roles as a negative. Rather, I see them as a sign we physicians have new opportunities to help create a stronger, healthier health care system.

In order to meet the needs of our patients and communities, physicians have to play an active role in health care redesign. We are the ones who best understand our patients. We listen to them, counsel them, heal them and alleviate their suffering. We have their best interest top of mind.

Our ability to interact with patients and provide them with the best care possible, however, is undermined by overbearing regulation and administrative burdens, many of which have been instituted without physician input. The current, needlessly wasteful and cumbersome medication prior authorization process is one example of this that quickly comes to mind. Our payment system, which is out of sync with the outcomes we are trying to achieve, is another. Electronic health record systems that add to our workload and do not deliver information in a convenient way are another.

Physicians are in the best position to help create systems that are good for patients and that are more in step with the realities of medicine. So, in my view, physicians need to take the lead in creating them. We should seek out roles in which we can play an active part in retooling aspects of the health care system in ways that will work for both patients and physicians.

We have many problems, large and small, in our health care system. We also have lofty goals. Surely, we need physicians leading the way and working with all stakeholders as we solve problems and work to make Minnesota the healthiest state and the best place to practice medicine.