The MMA held its Annual Conference online again this year on September 24, focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic and health equity.

Infectious disease expert Michael T. Osterholm, PhD, MPH, kicked off the event with “The COVID Pandemic: The Evolving Reality.” In the session, he discussed the state, federal and global response to COVID-19; the role of vaccines; the effect of variants in the fight against COVID-19; and where we go next, as a global community.

Osterholm’s address was followed by three concurrent sessions on the role medicine can play in policing, microaggressions and the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the mental health of physicians.

- “What Role Can Medicine Play on Issues Related to Policing?” featured Erika Kaske, David J. Satin, MD, and Joel T. Wu, JD, MPH, MD, HEC-C. It was moderated by MMA Secretary/Treasurer Carolyn McClain, MD.
- “Mitigating Microaggressions from Patients, Promoting Relationship-Centered Care” featured Taj Mustapha, MD, and was moderated by MMA member Nathan Chomilo, MD.
- “The Compounding Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Physicians” featured Jessi Gold, MD, MS, and was moderated by MMA member Nathan Chomilo, MD.

As part of the Annual Conference, MMA leadership reported to the membership about the current status of the association. Watch the 2021 Business Meeting video here: www.mnmed.org/education-and-events/Annual-Conference/Agenda.

Also leading up to the conference via video, the MMA handed out its annual awards to four physicians, two physicians-in-training, a state commissioner and a mental health advocacy organization. Each year, the MMA honors those in medicine for going above and beyond.

Distinguished Service Award
Kathryn Lombardo, MD, received the MMA’s highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award, for her years of service to the association and to medicine.

President’s Awards
Jill Amsberry, DO, and Nathan Chomilo, MD, received the MMA’s President’s Award, which recognizes those who have given much of their free time to help improve the association.

Medical Student Leadership Award
Dominique Earland received the MMA’s Student Leadership Award, which recognizes medical students who demonstrate exemplary leadership in service to fellow medical students, the profession of medicine and the broader community.

Residents and Fellows Leadership Award
J.P. Janowski received the inaugural MMA’s Resident and Fellow Leadership Award, which recognizes residents/fellows who demonstrate exemplary leadership in service to their peers, the profession of medicine and the broader community.

James H. Sova Memorial Award for Advocacy
James H. Sova was the chief lobbyist for the MMA from 1968 until the time of his death in December 1981. This award is given to a person who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of public policy, medical sciences, medical education, medical care or the socioeconomics of medical practice. Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm was this year’s recipient.

Eric C. Dick Memorial Health Policy Partner Award
This new award is given to an individual, group of individuals, a project or an organization that demonstrates commitment to pursuing sound public policy, building coalitions and creating and/or strengthening partnerships with the goal of improving the health of Minnesotans or the practice of medicine in Minnesota. Dick was the MMA’s manager of state legislative affairs from 2010 until his death in January 2021. This year’s recipient was Minnesota’s National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

COPIC/MMA Foundation Humanitarian Award
Matt Bernard, MD, received the COPIC/MMA Foundation Humanitarian Award, which recognizes MMA members who go above and beyond to help address the healthcare needs of underserved populations in Minnesota.

Thank you, sponsors
The MMA would like to thank the sponsors of this year’s conference: Platform sponsor–COPIC; Premier sponsor–AstraZeneca; Platinum sponsor–UCare; Gold sponsors–Greenwald Wealth Management, Green Goods and Advance Brain + Body Clinic; and Bronze sponsor–Skills Autism Therapy and Parent Enrichment.
News Briefs

BMP agrees to amend licensure language
In September, the Minnesota Board of Medical Practice (BMP) unanimously voted to amend the licensure application language requiring disclosure of past and current health conditions to instead ask “Do you currently have any condition that is not being appropriately treated which is likely to impair or adversely affect your ability to practice medicine with reasonable skill and safety in a competent, ethical and professional manner?”

“This action is a significant step forward in supporting the health of Minnesota’s physicians by encouraging physicians to ask for help when needed,” says immediate past-MMA President Marilyn Peitso, MD. “The change ensures that adequate treatment of a condition does not need to be disclosed.”

This vote comes after months of work by the MMA and others such as Twin Cities Medical Society, Zumbro Valley Medical Society, Physicians Serving Physicians, NAMI Minnesota, Mayo Clinic, Allina Health and the Minnesota Psychiatric Society, as well as individual physicians.

The change to the initial and renewal application will take effect on January 1, 2022.

Moose Lake family medicine physician takes over as MMA president
Randy Rice, MD, (pictured above), a family medicine physician in Moose Lake, was inaugurated as the 155th president of the MMA at the association’s virtual Annual Conference on September 24. He officially began his one-year term on October 1.

Other MMA officers for 2022 include: Will Nicholson, MD, a family medicine physician and hospitalist in Maplewood, who was elected president-elect. Marilyn Peitso, MD, a pediatric hospitalist in St. Cloud, assumes the role of immediate past-president. Carolyn McClain, MD, an emergency department physician in the Twin Cities, continues as secretary-treasurer. Edwin Bogonko, MD, a hospitalist in Shakopee, continues to serve as board chair.

Other newly elected leaders include:
- Saam Dilmaghani, MD, MPH, was elected as the resident/fellow trustee; Amrit Singh, MBBS, an oncologist from Mankato, was re-elected as a trustee.
- John P. Abenstein, MSEE, MD, FASA, was re-elected to serve as an AMA delegate for the MMA. C. Dennis O’Hare, MD, and Laurel Ries, MD, were both re-elected to serve as AMA alternate delegates. AMA delegates and alternate delegates take office beginning January 1, 2022.

Save the date: Day at the Capitol scheduled for March 1, 2022
The MMA is planning to return to the state Capitol in-person in March for its annual Day at the Capitol event. Stay tuned to MMA News Now for updates.

MMA offers resource to battle COVID-19 vaccine misinformation
Physicians are a trusted source of expertise and knowledge. Patients, and perhaps even friends, neighbors and acquaintances, look to you for the straight scoop. Yet breaking through the misinformation on social media and the internet can be challenging. To help, the MMA has compiled some of the common COVID-19 vaccine questions and concerns you may be asked. This new PDF is designed to support you in your efforts to educate your patients and address their fears and concerns. Find it here: https://www.mnmed.org/advocacy/Key-Issues/Coronavirus-Disease

Report shows use of telehealth is increasing significantly
A new AMA report shows physicians significantly increased their use of telehealth between September 2018 and September 2020. During this time, the share of physicians in practices that used
videoconferencing to provide patient visits increased from 14.3 percent to 70.3 percent. The report also shows that telehealth was used to treat a diverse set of patients with a variety of needs. In 2020, 58 percent of physicians said their practices used telehealth to diagnose or treat patients, 59.2 percent to manage patients with chronic disease and 50.4 percent to provide care to patients with acute disease.

**Practicing medicine in uncivil times**

Immediate past-MMA President Marilyn Peitso, MD, discussed practicing medicine in uncivil times in the latest edition of *Insights*. “Patients and family members are rejecting our advice about COVID-19 vaccinations, rejecting the same expertise that may have carried them or their family member through a stroke, heart attack, or difficult pregnancy in the not-too-distant past,” she writes. Read the entire piece here: www.mnmed.org/news-and-publications/insights-archive/September-2021/Practicing-Medicine-in-Uncivil-Times.

**Mayo student wins top prize in business innovation contest**

Mayo Clinic Alix School of Medicine student and MMA member Allisa Song and her startup company won the Minnesota Cup on September 20. The annual contest, run by the University of Minnesota’s Carlson School of Management, recognizes innovative businesses in the state. Song’s company, Nanodropper, Inc., makes a device that reduces the size of eyedrops. Song won the $50,000 grand prize and the $25,000 student division prize.

**Women In Medicine event set for November 11**

In an effort to support gender equity in medicine, the MMA will host “Women in Medicine—An Evening of Conversation and Action” on November 11, 7–8:30 p.m.

Each participant will have the opportunity to engage in moderated small groups, which will include:

- Networking with peers.
- Identifying future event and activities possibilities aimed at helping women in medicine succeed.
- Determining policy and advocacy needs.

To sign up, go to: https://ebiz.mnmed.org/DNN/Events/MMA-Events-Calendar.
Changes in MMA’s local-state structure

Approximately 20 years ago, the MMA had 33 component (or county) medical societies across the state. These local societies were chartered by the MMA to operate in a defined geographic area; facilitate local physician engagement, education and support; provide leadership opportunities to local physicians; and elect delegates to attend the MMA’s annual House of Delegates (HOD) meeting. Membership was, and still is, unified—meaning that members join both organizations.

On January 1, 2022, there will be three remaining MMA component medical societies—Steele County, Wright County and Zumbro Valley Medical Society. So, what happened and why?

Certainly, some of the change in component societies can be attributed to the parallel changes in how and where physicians practice medicine. As larger practices and integrated care systems have expanded, both in size and geography, many medical practices have shifted to more regional models. For some component societies, their defined geographies increasingly bore little resemblance to how and where local physicians worked or lived. On a practical level, most component societies relied exclusively on physician volunteers to manage their governance and finances and, over time, several struggled to identify enough new volunteers willing to assume the workload.

Changes at the MMA level also had an impact. In 2013, in response to shrinking attendance and growing frustration with bureaucratic processes, the MMA adopted changes to its governance that eventually led to the sunsetting of the HOD in 2018. These governance changes also expanded member involvement with the adoption of member-wide elections and creation of a new Policy Council. The shift away from the HOD meant that local society delegates were no longer needed. New MMA member-engagement strategies, such as listening sessions and dedicated outreach staff, further blurred the lines between local and state society activities. With new technology—expanded dramatically during the pandemic—the MMA has created ways for physicians to directly influence MMA policy 24/7/365 (The Pulse) and to virtually convene physicians in direct dialogue and education.

Among the recent component society changes of note was the April 2021 decision by Twin Cities Medical Society (TCMS) leadership to separate from the MMA and end its role as an MMA component society. Although the implications of this decision are not yet fully known, one immediate result is that MMA dues for physicians from the seven-county Twin Cities metro area (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington) will decrease by $280 (or $272 for three-year members). Importantly, the TCMS decision does not affect the benefits and value of MMA membership.

There are fewer component medical societies than in the past, but those that remain continue to serve a valued and a valuable role in supporting the local needs and interests of physicians. Steele County Medical Society, for example, provides social events and supports local organizations serving their community. Zumbro Valley Medical Society, which has full-time staff, has built strong alliances with many Rochester organizations to support local policy change, health improvement and education. For members who no longer have a local society, the MMA is committed to continuing to develop new opportunities for local gatherings and work; your membership continues to allow you to engage in all MMA activities that are of interest to you.

The work of the MMA is always evolving to meet the needs of Minnesota physicians and physicians-in-training. Changes in MMA’s structure to deliver efficient and valuable benefits is part of that evolution, but our mission to be the leading voice of medicine to make Minnesota the healthiest state and the best place to practice remains steadfast.

Janet Silversmith
JSilversmith@mnmed.org

FROM THE CEO

Janet Silversmith
VIEWPOINT

A much-needed victory for mental health

For many of us, the past two years have been angst-ridden. The pandemic, racial injustice, the deepening political divide between neighbors, tumultuous climate change and patients no longer trusting the decisions that we make based on the latest science.

So much is weighing us down mentally. We are tired and many of us are struggling. Numerous surveys and studies report physicians experience burnout at rates of 60 percent. In addition to its toll on clinicians, physician burnout alone costs the healthcare industry more than $4.6 billion per year, according to a 2019 study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

We need to be encouraging each other to seek help when needed rather than continue to further stigmatize mental health. That's why the Board of Medical Practice’s (BMP) decision in September to amend its licensure application language was such a huge victory for all of us.

Prior to that decision, the application language asked about an applicant’s mental and physical health conditions within the past five years that if untreated could impair their ability to practice safely. This had a chilling effect on physicians throughout the state. Some went so far as to refuse to address their mental health, in part because they feared having their medical license denied or limited. This stigma has only grown during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which we have expected our physicians to remain on the front lines battling the virus and treating patients, while at the same time neglecting to support and/or encourage them to seek help if they need it.

Thanks to the engagement of medical students and residents, the MMA and other advocacy groups, went to work. (We extend our gratitude to all who contributed to this effort—the Twin Cities Medical Society, Zumbro Valley Medical Society, Physicians Serving Physicians, NAMI Minnesota, Mayo Clinic, Allina Health, the Minnesota Psychiatric Society, as well as individual physicians.) It wasn’t a slam dunk. In fact, early efforts to urge the BMP to make the changes were resisted. The burnout and challenges of the pandemic actually helped to breathe new life into the effort. The MMA helped coordinate the parties, lined up testifiers and alerted our members to contact the BMP directly. Many individual physicians attended online BMP meetings to share their own experiences with the deterring effect of the application language and the importance of this change. All made it clear that adequately treated conditions, as well as past conditions that do not currently impair one’s ability to practice medicine, should not be disclosed.

In the end, the BMP heard us and agreed with the advocates. The language now reads: “Do you currently have any condition that is not being appropriately treated which is likely to impair or adversely affect your ability to practice medicine with reasonable skill and safety in a competent, ethical and professional manner?”

The change to the initial and renewal application will take effect on January 1, 2022.

This is a huge victory for physicians in Minnesota. It’s the kind of advocacy the MMA is proud to be part of and a change that will likely save lives. It’s also an example of how individual members can make a difference. With your support, we will continue to work tirelessly to make Minnesota the best place to practice and the healthiest state. MM