

Finding your voice in advocacy

Steph Lee, MD

My time with the AMA has been relatively new. Many members start their advocacy journey in medical school. It wasn't until I started my second residency, in preventive medicine and public health, that I realized how important national and local advocacy is for physicians.

This past year has been a lot of firsts for me. I attended my first annual meeting last year and saw the impact residents can have on AMA policy. I then attended the interim meeting and submitted my first resolution on strategies for reducing burnout in medical trainees. I started representing resident and fellows on the South Carolina Medical Association (SCMA) Board of Trustees. As a board member, I attended my first press conference at the South Carolina statehouse on medical marijuana and met with local legislators.

My AMA and SCMA involvement have shown me how an organization can be influential in supporting or opposing public issues related to medicine. Physicians are the boots on the ground, all affected by health policies, but only a select few choose to be advocates. However, it's such critical work. We need those public health voices on the front lines with legislators to make sure the priority is always the health of our patients and our communities, instead of political self-interest or party lines.

I've had a great time learning about population health and the different issues that come with public health work versus individual clinical care. Being a part of organized medicine has opened so many doors for me. I am excited to continue this journey and see what's next.

Dr. Lee is a pediatrician and in her final year of preventive medicine residency in South Carolina.