

Empowerment through Involvement

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We've all been there in the Doctor's Lounge waiting for the next case in the OR or just grabbing a quick lunch before seeing office patients in the afternoon, when the usual complainer starts their tirade. Commonly, it's "the practice of medicine is being taken over by beaurocrats, extenders and hospitals", "professional liability costs are too high," and "our AMA and State Medical Associations are standing idly by and letting it all happen." I usually interject—"Are you a member of your County, State Association and the AMA?" "Of course not" they answer, "what have they done for me lately?"

Sadly this is still a common occurrence when physicians interact across our country. Too many rank and file doctors don't know how their voices and issues are taken to the State and National Legislatures by Organized Medicine. Because so many choose to be uninvolved, they feel like helpless victims of the Medical Complex of Hospitals, Pharmaceutical Companies , and Beaurocrats. They haven't yet realized that when you become a participant in the system, which begins with the electoral process electing government officials that understand medical issues, that they can gain access in influencing the decision makers that shape policies that dictate the delivery of care.

Luckily, I discovered this truth early in medical school. At that time we were facing a Professional Liability crisis in Florida. Many OB-GYNs were having to make the tough decision of not delivering babies because they couldn't afford the high cost of insurance. Doctors, residents and students came together with the FMA to fight for Amendment 3 which capped non-economic

damage awards that had been rising exponentially. Although we initially won the Amendment, it was later overturned by the Supreme Court.

My experience in this crisis showed me that doctors are empowered and feel less like victims when they become participants in creating change. We will never have the financial resources to outspend our ideological opponents. However, we can form alliances with like minded groups, pool our resources and make a difference. We must remember that as doctors we are still trusted and people listen to us.

Sometimes achieving our policy wish list takes patience. We must be persistent in participating in the political advocacy process by helping friends of medicine get elected, and developing relationships with them early on. As we interact with our patients we should not shy away from discussing medicine's most important concerns. We should facilitate the dialogue that leads to crafting good policies through the collective wisdom of our State Medical Associations and our AMA. Finally, we must select the most effective spokespersons among us to carry our message to state and national leaders. As a result of consistently doing these things, we can change the Medical Delivery system for the better in this country and feel like Change Makers and less like Victims.