



AMA Adopts New Policies to Improve Health of Nation at Interim Meeting

DALLAS (Nov. 10, 2014) - The American Medical Association (AMA), the premier national physician organization in the country, gathered physician and medical student leaders representing all aspects of medicine during its Interim Meeting and today voted to adopt new policies on emerging health care topics.

The AMA's House of Delegates is the policy-making body at the center of American medicine, bringing together an inclusive group of physicians, medical students and residents representing every state and medical field. Delegates work in a democratic process to create a national physician consensus on emerging issues in public health, science, ethics, business and government to continually provide safer, higher quality and more efficient care for patients and communities.

The policies adopted by the House of Delegates today include:

AMA Bolsters Response to Urgent Epidemics Affecting the U.S.

New policy adopted today calls on the AMA to continue serving as a trusted source of information and education for physicians, health professionals and the public on urgent epidemics, including the Ebola virus. The new AMA policy also strongly supports the health care workers and U.S. military members responding to the Ebola epidemic in affected countries, and recognizes the need for improved public health infrastructure and surveillance in Ebola-ravaged countries.

“Continued volunteer efforts of nurses, physicians, and other health care workers are fundamental to international efforts to contain and end the Ebola outbreak at its source,” said AMA President Robert M. Wah, M.D. “It is critical that we support and protect U.S. health professionals who are working on the frontlines to bring this public health threat under control.”

One key directive in the new policy calls on the AMA to provide leadership by collaborating with public health officials to provide medical expertise on guidance that would help ensure that the nation’s health system is adequately prepared to respond to this public health epidemic.

In recent weeks, the AMA has provided an [Ebola Resource Center](#) for the public and physicians on our website to serve as a hub of science-based information from top national and international sources including the CDC, WHO and JAMA.

Curbing Solitary Confinement of Juveniles in Correctional Facilities

The AMA today called for correctional facilities to halt the isolation of juveniles in solitary confinement for disciplinary purposes. The new policy supports restricting the use of isolation in juvenile correction facilities for only extraordinary circumstances.

“Recognizing the harmful physical, emotional and psychological impact of solitary confinement can have on the health of prisoners, the AMA will oppose solitary confinement as a punishment in juvenile correctional facilities,” said AMA Board Member William E. Kobler, M.D. “These facilities should restrict the use of isolation procedures to occasions when there is an acute risk to the health and safety of the juvenile or others.”

The policy also stresses that the isolation of juveniles for clinical or therapeutic purposes must be conducted under the supervision of a physician.

Medicaid Expansion Options and Alternatives

Believing that all patients should have access to the care they need, the AMA is concerned about the high number of low-income adults who remain uninsured in states that have opted not to expand their Medicaid programs. A new AMA policy passed today encourages policymakers at all levels to focus their efforts on working together to identify realistic coverage options for adults currently in the coverage gap, even if states choose not to adopt the Medicaid expansion outlined in the Affordable Care Act. The policy encourages states that are not participating in Medicaid expansion programs to develop waivers that support expansion plans that best meet the needs and priorities of their low income adult populations. Further, the AMA encourages the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to approve waivers that are consistent with the goals and spirit of expanding insurance coverage. The policy also urges that states use a transparent process for evaluating the success of their efforts to expand access to care and to report the results annually on their Medicaid websites.

“The AMA is sensitive to state concerns about expanding Medicaid in a traditional manner, but we believe they must find ways to expand health insurance coverage to their uninsured populations, especially as coverage disparities continue to grow between expansion and non-expansion states,” said AMA Immediate Past Board Chair, David O. Barbe, M.D. “We encourage states that would otherwise reject the opportunity to expand their Medicaid programs to develop expansion waivers that help increase coverage options for their low income adult residents.”

Sobriety Checkpoints

Every two-hours, three people are killed in alcohol-related highway crashes, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Sobriety checkpoints have been proven to substantially reduce alcohol-related crashes, which is why the AMA adopted a new policy today to support the increased use of legal and constitutional sobriety checkpoints and advocate with state medical societies to overturn bans on the use of them to deter driving under the influence.

“Sobriety checkpoints are one of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s primary recommendations for reducing drunk driving, and this new policy will help increase the use of these checkpoints to save lives,” said AMA Board Member Mary Anne McCaffree, M.D.

FSMB State Licensing Compact

In an effort to make it easier for physicians to obtain licenses in multiple states while providing access to safe, quality care, the AMA adopted policy supporting an interstate compact developed by the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB).

Under the new policy, the AMA will work with medical associations, FSMB, and other interested stakeholders to ensure expeditious adoption of the compact and the creation of an Interstate Medical Licensure Commission. Through the licensure process, state medical boards assure that physicians are qualified - reviewing their education, training, character, and professional and disciplinary histories. In order to protect the interest of patients and their safety when medical services are provided either in-person or via telemedicine, we must maintain physician accountability, which requires state oversight.

“At least 10 state medical boards have adopted the compact, which streamlines the licensing process for physicians seeking licenses in multiple states and increases patient access to telemedicine services and we encourage more states to sign on to the compact so that we can ensure standards of care are maintained, whether treatment is provided in-person or via telemedicine,” said AMA President-elect Steven J. Stack, M.D.

Coordination with Pharmacists to Improve Immunization Rates

With data showing that less than half of adults over age 18 received an influenza vaccine last year, the AMA today adopted policy encouraging efforts to increase immunization rates in the U.S.

The new AMA policy recognizes the current role of pharmacists in vaccinating target populations that lack access to a medical home or that are otherwise unlikely to receive immunizations through physician practices. The policy affirms that health professionals who administer vaccines have shared responsibilities to ensure that vaccination administration is documented in the patient medical record and calls on physicians and pharmacists, as a part of the healthcare delivery team, to work together in the community to encourage patients to follow-up with a primary care physician to ensure continuity of care.

“It is important that we ensure patients have access to the care they need when they need it, especially access to preventive care like immunizations,” said AMA Board Member William E. Kobler, M.D. “By complementing the efforts of physicians with the work of health professionals in other health settings to deliver vaccines, we have the ability to increase immunization rates, address vaccine-preventable illnesses and [improve health outcomes](#).”

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About the AMA

The American Medical Association is the premier national organization dedicated to empowering the nation's physicians to continually provide safer, higher quality, and more efficient care to patients and communities. For more than 165 years the AMA has been unwavering in its commitment to using its unique position and knowledge to shape a healthier future for America. For more information, visit ama-assn.org.