



Policy, Politics, and Medical School

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Less than a week after graduating from medical school, I can't help but laugh when I think back to my senior year of college trying to decide on a career. Less than five years ago, my childhood dream of becoming a physician had been brushed aside by my current interest in politics, largely fueled by Florida's contentious 2000 Presidential election. I was a political science major, and law school seemed like the perfect option after graduation. The individual practice of medicine seemed so insignificant to me when I thought about how the public policies we enact can affect millions. In my last semester of college, however, I would write a thesis on Medicaid reform that would change my life forever.

While doing the research for my thesis, I read books and articles written by a wide variety of professionals including physicians, politicians, professors, lawyers, accountants, nurses, economists, etc. It was clear to me that the physicians were the most knowledgeable about how any proposed policy change would affect health care delivery. Over and over again, it was the physician leaders and not the professors, politicians, or lawyers who were offering the best solutions to the numerous problems seen in Medicaid. Furthermore, the

physicians' viewpoint unapologetically placed the care of the patient at the forefront. By the completion of my thesis, I was convinced that the best way for me to have a positive impact on the overall practice of health care was to become a physician.

As a native Floridian, the mission of the Florida State University College of Medicine intrigued me, and I was excited to be a part of the nation's first new medical school in over 20 years. It has been an honor to be one of the first graduates of a medical school whose primary purpose is in educating Florida students for the benefit of Florida's patients. Upon arriving in Tallahassee, I soon realized that the school's location, the small class sizes, and the plethora of physician and student leaders would help to pique my already strong initial desire to become involved in organized medicine. While at FSU, I was very lucky to have been mentored by student leaders like Kimberly Ruscher-Rogers and Stephen Patrick, as well as faculty leaders like Dr. Alma Littles and Dr. Robert Brooks.

My background and interest in politics allowed me to follow the 2003 medical malpractice debate with a perspective that was not shared by the rest of my first year medical school classmates.

While most anatomy students were studying the brachial plexus, I wanted to rush home and watch hours of endless debate on "pierceable caps" and "bad faith." While my friends were memorizing the cranial nerves, I found myself memorizing the names of state senators. It was an interesting summer to say the least, and by the end of the special sessions I knew that I needed to become involved with the Florida Medical Association.

After serving as the Secretary and then the Chair of the FMA-Medical Student Section Governing Council, I was appointed to serve a two-year term on the FMA Board of Governors. This experience has given me even more respect for those physicians that are able to balance the demands of a busy practice and family life with a desire to help all of the physicians and patients of the state with their advocacy and leadership. My involvement with the FMA has also allowed me the opportunity to further develop my interest in >>>

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politics and public health policy by interacting with the best and brightest health care minds in Florida.

For one month during my senior year of medical school, I worked as an intern with the FMA legislative affairs staff. For me, this once in a lifetime opportunity was the culmination of my four-year involvement in organized medicine. I was able to witness on a daily basis the complex process of how policy and politics interact to form laws which affect Florida's 18 million citizens. My primary role on the legislative team was to research and track a number of important physician related bills as they made their way through each committee stop and onto the floor of each chamber.

One of the most contentious bills of the legislative session involved expanding the scope of practice for pharmacists to allow them to administer flu vaccinations. I initially did not know much about the bill, and to be honest, didn't really see the harm in pharmacists giving flu vaccines. As I studied the issue more carefully, however, I realized that there were a number of potential dangers in passing

such a bill. With pharmacists, instead of physicians administering the vaccines, there is a serious disruption in the physician-patient continuity of care. Also, the large chain pharmacies would control a greater proportion of the existing vaccine supply, which would likely result in physicians and hospitals having less on hand for their high risk patients. The administration of vaccines without physicians or nurses on hand also places the patient at higher risk if an adverse reaction to the vaccine were to occur.

I worked closely with FMA staff Francie Plendl and Michelle Jacquis to put these arguments into testimony that I would present to several House and Senate committees. My first experience testifying in front of the committees was quite intimidating, but I somehow survived it. We were unsuccessful, however, in blocking the bill from passing out of the committee on that day. I remember thinking that my testimony could have been delivered better, and I only half jokingly asked the FMA staff if I could be fired from an unpaid internship. Aside from doing research and testifying in front of the committees, I had the opportunity

to meet with many legislators and legislative staff on a wide range of health care issues. It was a great overall experience that I would recommend to any medical student who is interested in the political process. As an organization, we are extremely fortunate to have such a hard working and diligent staff working on our behalf all year long.

As I prepare for my residency and a career in orthopaedic surgery, I have a strong desire to stay active in politics and organized medicine. I hope to establish a practice in Florida after residency and help give back to the organization that has offered me so many leadership opportunities. Through working with the FMA, I have learned that a physician does not need to give up the dream of working for the betterment of society through public policy. On the contrary, as physicians we are called to use our unique perspective as medical experts and patient advocates to seek positive change in health care policy on the local, state, and national levels. ●

THE FMA ANNUAL PHYSICIANS ART SHOW

AUGUST 24-25,
2007
WESTIN DIPLOMAT
HOLLYWOOD, FL

The Florida Medical Association is proud to present the FMA Physicians Art Show. This is an excellent opportunity to showcase our talented physician artists! Works of art created by physicians will be displayed in a special area of the 2007 Florida Medical Expo Exhibition Hall.

Submitted artwork will be judged by a Physician Art Committee and prizes that will be awarded for "Best of Show," second place and third place in each category.

The show is open to the following art forms: Clay, wood, stone, bronze, paintings,

drawings, photography, ceramics, mosaics, jewelry – or any other medium.

The Florida Medical Association Foundation's Silent Auction is also taking place in the exhibition hall. Any custom artwork that you would like to donate to the Foundation is greatly appreciated. This is a Tax Deductible contribution that provides funding for our Medical Student's Scholarship Program.



For additional information contact the Florida Medical Association at 800.762.0233 or by email to Cindy Miller at cmiller@medone.org