

Dear Colleague,

We cannot effectively promote the health of our patients and communities unless we protect and promote the health of both the profession of medicine and our colleagues who practice it. The ISMA has long engaged in much of the work this mission requires: ensuring that our perspective is heard among decision-makers in our state, educating our broader communities on the many challenges facing healthcare, and offering meaningful opportunities for Indiana's physicians to learn through high-quality CME. But fully meeting this challenge will require the ISMA to be something more — an organization that, in both aspiration and practice, reflects the essential values that have always formed medicine's core.

In the same way that we care for the whole patient, we must also care for the whole of our profession. A house divided, as our fellow Hoosier Abraham Lincoln once said, cannot stand—and it is no less true of the house of medicine. The ISMA can never be more effective than the conversations taking place among its members, and these conversations require more input from Indiana's physicians and trainees. Our conversations must be vigorous, meaningful, and frequent; otherwise, we risk the impoverishment and fragmentation of our collective voice. Our decisions need input from all quarters of the organization, meaning that we convene and listen to our members, whose combined wisdom and experience far outweigh those of any group of leaders. And when our organization acts, the goals it seeks and its reasons for doing so must be transparent; otherwise, our colleagues are left in the dark as to what we are trying to do, why, and how our decisions are made.

As a profession, we must know what we are professing — what we stand for and declare before our communities and our government. Our organization must cultivate a capacity to influence healthcare in our state to promote those causes that are truly most worthy of our dedication. We need to have in mind the future of medicine, and not just the present — what is most convenient, advantageous, or comfortable now may not always promote our best aspirations. Our leadership must be willing to stand on principle, to facilitate difficult conversations both in the House of Delegates and at the Statehouse, and to act in the best interest of physicians and our patients—even when doing so is hard. Too often, the excellent physician of today takes care of patients in spite of our healthcare system, not because of it. The ISMA must find solutions to these complex problems that enhance medicine and inspire physicians.

We must also value and understand our rich history. Last year's celebration of the 175th anniversary of our organization should be just the start of situating today's issues and challenges in the context of the enduring principles of excellence in medicine that have stood the test of time and should guide us into the future. Great Hoosier physicians preceded us in this work, and we should do all we can to lay the groundwork for our professional successors to excel. Physicians past and future are counting on us to rise to this challenge.

Finally, we must continue to care for one another. The best places to receive medical care are generally the places where health professionals are thriving, but burnout remains a threat to both our colleagues and the patients for whom we care. Through initiatives such as the annual Finding Inspiration and Resilience in Medicine (FIRM) conference and ISMA's Physician Wellness Steering Committee, colleagues and I have been working to understand where burnout comes from and what we can do to prevent and alleviate it. One key conclusion – physicians tend to thrive when we do our best work, which means removing obstacles and creating the conditions for excellence. Team building is key. As the greatest coach in the history of American sports and fellow Hoosier John Wooden once said: “The player who brings out the best in the team is more important than the best player.” The role of the ISMA president is not to shine but to help the organization, the profession of medicine, and its members shine through better service to our patients and communities. We are here for a purpose, and this purpose is not to advance our own interests—it is to serve. It is not by grasping and clutching but through serving that we truly come to life.

These are contributions I have made in the past and remain well-prepared to make now. I have served as both President of the Faculty at IU School of Medicine and the Medical Staff at IU Health, during which we navigated our way through the uncharted waters of the COVID pandemic, including extraordinary challenges in policy creation, staff turnover, and professional morale. I served six years as a member of the council steering committee of the 40,000-member American College of Radiology and as President of the Indiana Radiological Society, working to promote the voices of members. I have long experience with advocacy, having created and annually taught advocacy courses to our medical students. I have also published over 1,100 articles in venues from NEJM and JAMA to the Atlantic and Psychology Today. It is crucial that we articulate our vision and priorities as effectively as possible, and I have delivered over 750 keynote addresses, named lectures, and grand rounds. During these visits to professional organizations, hospitals, and healthcare organizations, I spent more time listening than talking.

I have enjoyed the privilege, over the last 28 years, of teaching virtually every graduate of the IU School of Medicine and have been awarded both institutional and national teaching awards, including the top teaching award of the Association of American Medical Colleges. The word doctor comes from a Latin root meaning teacher, and this dedication to teaching has instilled in me habits of convening and facilitating good conversations, and drawing out the best of the ethics and professionalism of learners and colleagues. These learners have subsequently helped care for members of my own family, deepening my sense that we have a responsibility to pass on the torch of medicine burning even more brightly than when it was passed to us. The ISMA has a key role to play in this future by building even stronger educational relationships with our state's two medical schools and numerous residency training programs. By doing an even better job of helping our future colleagues thrive and lead, we can secure a brighter future for our profession and those we serve.

Long ago a traveler emerged from a forest into a clearing. There he found workmen wielding hammers and chisels. He went up to one and asked, "What are you doing?" The man said, "I am cutting stone." Then he asked another, eliciting the same response. But then he asked a third man, who answered quite differently – "We are building a cathedral." We in the ISMA need to ensure that medicine in this state is not made up of a ragtag collection of stone cutters but a united, inspired, and effective college of physicians. Those who passed the torch of medicine to us and those to whom we will someday pass it deserve nothing less.

Yours respectfully,

Richard Gunderman, MD