

## Presidential Address of Dr Christopher D. Jackson, 2023–2024 President of the Southern Medical Association

*The following is the presidential address of the Southern Medical Association's 2023–2024 president, Dr Christopher D. Jackson. Dr Jackson was installed on Saturday, October 28, 2023, during the SMA Annual Scientific Assembly, which was held October 26–28, 2023, in Greensboro, North Carolina.*

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, and honored guests,

Thank you all for gathering here today as we embark on a new chapter in the illustrious history of the Southern Medical Association. I am deeply humbled and honored to stand before you as the newly elected President of SMA. Seven years ago, I got my introduction to SMA in 2016 as a second-year internal medicine resident presenting a case of statin induced necrotizing autoimmune myopathy. Beyond my first oral abstract presentation at a national meeting, I gained a new family of dedicated individuals wanting to change the house of medicine for good. During that meeting, I remember speaking with then SMA President Dr. Ajoy Kumar, who encouraged me to keep participating in SMA and how I could lead this organization one day. Speaking with many others during that meeting, I remember thinking, "I'm not sure what my future in this organization looks like, but I know that I want to be part of the wonderful work going on here." This moment is not just about me, but it serves as a testament to our collective growth and progress. Today, we make history as I am the first Black president of this esteemed association, a milestone that we should all be proud of.

I am mindful of the responsibility that comes with this role, and I assure you, I am ready to rise to the challenge. The journey that brought me here was not traveled alone. I am indebted to my mentors, peers, friends, and family who have supported, guided, and inspired me throughout my career. I am standing on the shoulders of giants and it is my commitment to you that I will strive to be a worthy successor.

Mentorship is a key priority for my year as president. Evidence shows that mentoring improves careers for medical professionals, yet, not everyone can access quality mentorship. Unfortunately, significant disparities exist for women and people of color that prevent them from obtaining quality mentors. My plan is to use a strengths-based approach, where we capitalize on the diversity of experience and achievement among our SMA ranks. Mentorship doesn't just end with medical students and residents. Practicing

physicians and even those who are nearing the end of their career often need guidance on the next steps to take. I hope this is a process where everyone, regardless of their stage of life, can be included through a refined mentor matching process. To better equip our SMA members to be mentors, I will develop a mentoring academy focusing on providing the tools for successful mentoring relationships.

As I stand before you today, I am reminded of the great fortune we have at SMA in the form of burgeoning and established leaders. A shining beacon of this leadership is reflected in the evolution of our Physicians-in-Training Committee. Led by the vision and dedication of one medical student, Natalie Weiss, and one resident, Dr. Sangeetha Isaac, this committee has flourished to become one of the most productive in SMA's history. I hold a steadfast belief that within the ranks of SMA's membership, we have many more individuals like Natalie and Sangeetha waiting to step forward. My aim is to create a comprehensive, longitudinal leadership development program to empower our students and residents. This program will equip them with the tools to identify and address problems in medicine they are passionate about solving. Drawing upon the wealth of expertise present in this room, I am confident that we can develop a curriculum capable of nurturing physician leaders for generations to come. I envisage this leadership development course culminating each year with a ceremony at our annual Physicians-in-Training Conference.

Education is at the core of SMA's mission. My plan is to foster innovation in professional development and education. As technology and research continue to redefine the boundaries of healthcare, it is crucial that our physicians are not only keeping pace but also leading the way. Embracing new learning methodologies, integrating advanced technologies, and promoting a culture of continuous learning are key to this endeavor. By creating an environment that encourages curiosity, nurtures creativity, and celebrates innovative thinking, we can ensure our physicians are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills. This not only enhances their professional growth but also ensures the highest quality of care for our patients. Recognizing the varied clinical experiences of our members, I want to ensure our education efforts are relevant to those in academic medical centers, private practices, and in rural health settings.

I want to emphasize that while my election may be historic, the true measure of our progress will be reflected in the work we do, the lives we touch, and the changes we create. Let us all strive to leave a legacy that future generations of this association will be proud of.

I am excited about the possibilities that lie ahead of us. I am confident that, together, we can bring about meaningful changes and continue the Southern Medical Association's reputation of excellence. Thank you once again for this incredible honor. I look forward to serving you and the Southern Medical Association.