

Presidential Address of Dr Lawrence “Lee” Carter, 2022–2023 President of the Southern Medical Association

The following is the presidential address of the Southern Medical Association’s 2022–2023 president, Dr Lawrence “Lee” Carter. Dr Carter was installed on Sunday, October 30, 2022, during the SMA Southern Regional Assembly, which was held October 28–30, 2022, in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, live and virtually.

Thank you, Dr Breen, for your kind introduction. I am honored to serve as the 115th President of the Southern Medical Association, and I thank you all for entrusting me with this privilege.

As Dr Breen mentioned, I live with my family in Hickory, North Carolina, where I have practiced internal medicine for more than 20 years. Residing in what many would consider a more rural area of the state compared to larger cities such as Charlotte or Raleigh, I see numerous disparities in health care, but I also recognize that there are even more opportunities, especially within SMA, to help improve the lives of our patients.

As president, extending SMA’s Mentoring Program will be one of my key priorities. If you haven’t already done so, I strongly encourage each of you to sign up as either a mentee or a mentor. As healthcare providers, we are PRACTICING medicine, meaning that we are also ALWAYS learning. Although many colleagues have much to share and teach, they do not have the outlet or opportunity to do that. The same holds true for physicians-in-training who have questions or concerns but are not sure where to turn for guidance and insight.

As a multispecialty, interprofessional organization, SMA is uniquely positioned to connect physicians-in-training and physicians to foster growth and development. Whether you are in training, a few years into practice, or have established a distinguished career, with backgrounds ranging from academia to private practice, from internal medicine to otolaryngology to oncology, both mentors and mentees can benefit from this connection. By engaging with our trainees, we can work together and learn from each other, see what others are doing, and how they are doing it.

The outstanding abstracts presented by the physicians-in-training this weekend serve as an example of this lifelong learning and how we, as seasoned professionals, can gain knowledge just as we can impart our wisdom and experiences

to the next generation of physicians. Seeing the spark of these young men and women is why I went into medicine and I never want to lose that! It is humbling to think that much of what I practice today will likely be disproven in 10 years as medicine evolves, but with continued learning and sharing of knowledge comes power and as result, we can not only give our patients a better quality of life but also empower them to take better care of themselves.

And as we gain this knowledge from each other, HOW can it be used for the improvement of patient care, especially in areas of healthcare disparities which fall largely within SMA’s geographic footprint? I believe the answer is simple and will be another priority during my presidency: educating our communities!

Rather than focusing on the manpower necessary for patients finding a way to medical centers, which is oftentimes difficult due to factors such as distance and available transportation, let’s go out into the community and share our passion and our knowledge—educate our neighbors on prevention, on being proactive, rather than reactive, when it comes to their health care. Show them how to make a difference, help them to change behaviors, and incorporate them into the decision-making process!

Striving to both educate and empower my patients, I am struck by something within what has been referred to as the Blue Zones, five areas of the world where people were once believed to have lived the longest. And although there are questions surrounding the validity of the Blue Zones, there are valuable lessons that can be learned from them and it was interesting but perhaps not surprising to me that gardening was viewed as a common denominator for longevity.

In addition to the health benefits of daily physical activity, working with your hands outside in the sun and fresh air, growing food and sharing the literal fruits of your labor with your neighbors, all foster this strong sense of community and responsibility. Taking care of each other and expecting nothing in return: this is the foundation that we can build upon as we help each other, learn from each other, and take this knowledge into our communities to help guide our patients toward a better life.

I love helping my patients in this way and if you love what you do, it is a passion. If you don’t love what you do, it becomes a stressor and stressed out equals burned out. And in today’s ever-changing healthcare landscape, burnout is on the rise, and many may find it easy to lose their passion. Medicine in many ways has become politicized, but as an apolitical organization whose sole mission is education, SMA is poised to provide you with outlets for collaboration among colleagues, a variety of continuing medical education to help you provide quality patient care, and opportunities to share your expertise with others. In turn, we can help those patients in underserved communities realize their abilities to change, rather than just treat.

During my time as SMA president, I want to focus on these areas and I believe that by all of us working together, we can

educate and empower not only the patients we care for on a daily basis but also each other. SMA is the Family of Medicine, and with family comes a sense of belonging. You belong here, and I encourage all of you to become involved. If you are not currently an SMA member, please join. Participate, educate, and motivate. Share your passion and your voice. We all can provide invaluable wisdom

and knowledge, supporting and learning from each other in the process. After all, that is what families do! Thank you!

Lawrence “Lee” Carter, MD

President

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