

Presidential Address of Dr Donna Breen, 2021–2022 President of the Southern Medical Association

The following is the presidential address of the Southern Medical Association's 2021–2022 president, Dr Donna Breen. Dr Breen was installed on Saturday, October 30, 2021, during the SMA Southern Regional Assembly, which was held October 28–30, 2021, in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, live and virtually.

Dr Morris, SMA Board Members, SMA and Alliance Members and Staff, I feel excited and honored to have been selected as your new president for 2022. First, let me introduce myself: I am an otolaryngologist, practicing general ear, nose, and throat medicine and allergy for the past 30 years in Marksville, Louisiana after finishing my residency at Tulane in 1988. I am a 1983 graduate of the University of Alabama Medical School. I am proud to serve the needs of my small-town community and care for both adults and children who would have to travel many miles for their care. I really get to know my patients and their families, as well as their extended families and friends, which engages me in their lives as their doctor, mentor, and friend. It is truly the best of both worlds, and I treasure my practice as a small-town physician.

My History with the SMA

I have been a member of SMA since 1984, when I was a resident at Tulane. At that time, I needed medical insurance and SMA offered quality insurance at great prices. I also presented at SMA meetings as a resident and was really impressed by the quality of presentations, spirit of congeniality, and the stress-free learning atmosphere. The meetings were such a delight. There were ample opportunities for personal networking and consulting with experts and colleagues. No question was too frivolous or foolish. Everyone was very generous in helping extend your medical knowledge and skills. Also, the SMA staff could not have been more welcoming and helpful to me as a resident and later as a practicing physician. This definitely sealed the deal for me, and I have been a faithful member ever since. The COVID-19 virus has placed a hindrance to our face-to-face meetings, but not to our enthusiasm for learning from our colleagues.

What Can You Receive from SMA Membership Participation?

Education is what SMA is really all about. It is our primary reason for existence. The distinguished *Southern Medical Journal* over the years has been a true icon of our commitment to publishing cutting-edge research in advancing medical knowledge. Our conferences and meetings feature prominent speakers

from every specialty. No matter the field in which you practice, whether it is Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Subspecialty of Medicine, or General Surgery or Subspecialties of Surgery, there is always a learning experience for you at our meetings and programs. The educational programs have now been expanded to podcasts, as well as mentorships.

Under the direction and leadership of Dr Steven Strode, the Education Committee has been working hard to keep improving our programs, and we are reinstating both the Research and Education Endowment Fund and the Dr. Robert D. and Alma W. Moreton Research Award and Commemorative Lectureship to award participants in advancing research.

Meetings are a wonderful opportunity for advancing your education, picking up pearls of knowledge, sharing cases with colleagues, and networking with other physicians. Not only do we learn but we also socialize, get to know new people, and connect with old friends. A well-rounded education gives one tremendous advantage in patient care.

Next, our new Physicians-in-Training Committee, chaired by Natalie Weiss from Tulane, is a welcome addition to our Board. The committee is already performing at an accelerated level. It has hit the floor running. Their projects and podcasts have already borne much fruit and increased our resident and student participation in SMA over 200%.

We have recently expanded our membership benefits to include new and improved group medical insurance, life and disability insurance, ID theft coverage, and AirMed services. Also, we have a new malpractice carrier. SMA's IRA program is a tremendous asset to physicians for their future retirement.

Goals and Objectives

My first goal this year as your new president is to increase funding for our scholarships and research presentation awards, both the posters, as well as oral presentations, by increasing our monetary rewards for these entities as well as travel stipends. To increase participation in our seminars and Annual Assembly, let us provide adequate travel support to help residents and students attend our meeting, give better cash awards for best poster and research presentations, and increase our scholarship disbursements. I think we should be proactive in asking our financial partners as well as our membership to step up and be generous in rewarding good research. We can be a benefactor to the up-and-coming doctors, and this would be our legacy. With more support, I would like to have prominent national speakers in many different fields that would promote attendance. I would suggest that we expand the days of our Annual Assembly for more presentations. This will allow for more physician-in-training participation as well.

My second objective is to ensure the legacy of our organization, which has survived for 115 years and give it another. With enthusiastic member involvement and participation in our programs, we will endure. Participation in organized medicine is not the priority it once was in the past. There are many reasons for this. We are competing with many different ways medical information is shared and knowledge acquired. We are at a

watershed moment in the history of our country and the SMA as a purveyor of organized medicine. Today, the rapid dissemination of vast amounts of information, whether valid or not, requires a gatekeeper to act as arbiter of what is science or fiction. Organized medicine is the natural modality to channel this information and provide structure and validity.

Forty years ago, we were hit by a deadly virus, the HIV virus, that devastated our country and cost the lives of many citizens. Through intensive research and development, we now have the HIV virus contained and relegated to chronic nonlethal disease. Today, we are fighting against another vicious virus, which is taking the lives of many of our loved ones and causing untold suffering and heartbreak. Our medical community is stressed as never before. We must and will conquer this virus through research,

collaboration, clinical trials, and clinical practice, just as we contained HIV. Organized medicine is needed through its role in medical education and collaboration. The Southern Medical Association is ready. So, stay with us, learn with us, and be a part of the journey.

My personal wish is that one day soon we will relegate the COVID-19 virus to the dust heap of history, along with other deadly viruses such as polio and smallpox. And we are at Disney World where wishes can come true! Thank you.

Donna Breen, MD

President

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