

Reflections

Reflecting on what it means to be part of an organization with a legacy of 120 years

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Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society (AΩA) has been recognizing, advocating for, and inspiring physicians in teaching, the care of patients and promotion of health for 120 years. The society aspires for all in the medical profession to be worthy to serve the suffering.

Election to AΩA is an honor signifying a lasting commitment to clinical excellence, professionalism, leadership, scholarship, research, and community service. A lifelong honor, membership in AΩA confers recognition for a physician's dedication to medical professionalism, and the science and art of healing. Membership may be attained throughout one's professional career—as a medical student, resident, fellow, faculty member, alumni, clinician, or distinguished leader in medicine.

Members are recognized as excellent doctors whose knowledge, skills, professionalism, trustworthiness, care of the patient, compassion, empathy, altruism, humility, and responsibility position them as servant leaders. Since its founding in 1902, more than 200,000 members have been elected to the society.

I will never forget the day in 1964 when I was elected to be a member of AΩA—it was the proudest moment of my career. I was a first-generation college graduate. When I thought about what I might do as a career, I postulated that I could be a doctor and care for patients; however, my undergraduate major was history. Fortunately, I was informed that I had completed the pre-med requirements, and was qualified to apply to medical school. I applied, and, to my surprise and great celebration, was accepted.

Upon my arrival at the University of Southern California School of Medicine I was terrified, certain that I was underprepared and would fail. As a result of hard work, perseverance, teamwork, diligence, excellent teachers, physician mentors, and diverse patients, I received my MD degree in 1964.

It was in my senior year when I was notified that I had been elected to AΩA. Nothing could compare to the pride, gratification, and humility I felt. I knew that with election to AΩA came immense responsibility, commitment, and duty.

Throughout my career, I have always had my framed AΩA certificate hanging in my office, from residency, to fellowship, to clinical practitioner, to academic positions as executive vice chancellor, executive vice president, chancellor, and now as executive director of AΩA. Often times, it

has served as a conversation piece for patients, colleagues, and the general public, and always as a source of great pride.

I explain to those both familiar with AΩA, as well as those who are just learning about the society, the history of William Root, his legacy, and how the AΩA certificate stands for a community of practice representing professionalism, leadership, and ethics in medicine. I explain how AΩA members are dedicated to caring for all people, how they support clinical excellence, and how they lead based on service to others with a moral responsibility to providing the highest quality health care for all.

I explain how AΩA members discover and apply new knowledge, teach future physicians, and serve society.

I explain how we are a professional community of practice contributing on myriad levels to the betterment of health care throughout the world. A community of practice that forges a bond of camaraderie and trust that achieves success by working together for a common cause to improve care and health. A community of practice with a goal to inspire each other to create an environment in which great ideas are shared and often brought to fruition. A community of practice based on trust allows us to work with, and rely on, others to seek advice in making decisions.

Even when the health care system feels chaotic and disorganized, the AΩA community of practice retains cohesiveness and support through our common mission of recognizing high educational achievement; honoring gifted teaching; encouraging the development of leaders in academia and the community; supporting the ideals of humanism; and promoting service to others. We find joy in the essence of the doctor-patient relationship and the bond we have with our patients and each other.

I explain how AΩA is committed to improving diversity based on evidence that inclusion of talented individuals from different backgrounds benefits patient care, population health, education, and scientific discovery. I explain how AΩA works to overcome bias throughout our profession, and how AΩA values a diverse, fair, and equitable work and learning environment for all.

I explain how for 120 years AΩA has been, and continues to be, committed to excellence and achievement, our patients, our community of practice, a healthy society, medical professionalism, leadership, service, teaching, and scientific discovery and application. I explain how I, along with each of our 200,000 members since 1902, strive to “Be worthy to serve the suffering,” as this is our commitment to our profession and the patients we serve, and we are proud to accept this responsibility.