

COVID-19. As a Physician Assistant in Urgent Care, I have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an undergraduate majoring in Public Health, I never imagined I would someday be leading a county medical society during the worst pandemic in 100 years.

Today's global pandemic highlights the need for a strong viable county medical society. Conflicting public policies, some formed with a reckless disregard for evidence-based medicine and well-established public health practices, have led to over 440,000 American deaths, as well as economic chaos not seen since the Great Depression.

In our own county, we watched a seasoned health officer fired for questionable reasons in the worst days of the pandemic. As healthcare providers, we have been and will continue to be outspoken as the voice of reason and medical science in battling this pandemic. Let's be clear. Wearing a mask is not a political statement. Everyone wants sustainable economic recovery, but the hard truth is that won't happen unless we control the pandemic. Common sense public health practice and support for regional efforts to immunize the public is the only way through this crisis. People of all political persuasions need to work together to help the region and the nation navigate through the next 6-12 months.

Our mission statement calls us to be advocates for our patients and the communities we serve. We support the efforts of the Washington State Medical Association on managing the pandemic. We spoke out publicly against the decision by the Spokane Regional Health District and the Board of Health to fire Dr. Bob Lutz. We will work tirelessly with community partners to ensure that medical science rather than short-term political expediency drives public policy regarding the pandemic. Good news appears on the horizon, including a clear consistent national policy for managing the pandemic and distributing vaccines.

I have been a member of the SCMS Board of Trustees for the past four years. During my tenure the SCMS has gone through a challenging process of reassessment of its core mission. Faced with declining membership, we sought input from community physicians, PAs, residents, medical and PA students, and leaders from the major regional health systems. We asked whether there was even an ongoing need for a county medical society. The answer we got was a resounding "yes". They reaffirmed the need for a regional independent organization that advocates for continued improvement in the practice of medicine and improving the health of our patients. We reevaluated our mission statement and prioritized four areas of focus: member collegiality, community engagement, medical education and medical advocacy. At the same time we reduced our operating expenses and cut the cost of membership. We have emerged a leaner, more effective organization.

I am honored to be elected as the first Physician Assistant President of the Spokane County Medical Society. PAs have been worked collaboratively with physicians since the advent of the PA profession in 1965.

As a PA I bring a unique skillset to the job of President in these challenging times. I began my career in medicine as an Air Force Medic. Prior to attending PA school, I worked as a community health educator in South Korea, then got an MBA while working in sales, marketing and operations for a Fortune 100 telecommunications company. Since receiving a National Health Service Corps Scholarship, I have worked in two federally qualified health centers and a Family Practice Residency Training Program, all of which place a high priority on working with medically underserved populations.

In 2021, SCMS will support our membership with ongoing updates on COVID-19. Our annual meeting will feature a member of the Biden Administration's COVID-19 task force discussing the national pandemic response. We will also be offering a Zoom meeting with our interim Regional Health Officer on the pandemic response efforts in Spokane County. We will also be working in partnership with other local community stakeholders to seek greater input into public policy formation to ensure that it is guided by science. 2021 will also feature our second annual golf classic, our annual Medicine CME program, and input for the WSMA House of Delegates on policy changes for statewide medical practice.

We also hope to expand our membership and to promote new leadership within the organization. The stability and vitality of our organization requires a steady stream of community providers willing to step up and join the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee. These are extraordinary times. We have an extraordinary group of members. Join us!

Barry Linehan, PA-C
2021 SCMS President