

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

B of T Report 24-A-24

Subject: Report on the Preservation of Independent Medical Practice

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1 BACKGROUND

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3 At its 2022 Annual Meeting, the House of Delegates (HOD) adopted Resolution 602, “Report on
4 the Preservation of Independent Medical Practice,” which directed the American Medical
5 Association (AMA) to issue a report every two years communicating AMA efforts to support
6 independent medical practices.

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8 Resolution 602 appended AMA policy D-405.988, The Preservation of the Private Practice of
9 Medicine, which among other things affirmed the Association’s support for the preservation of
10 private practice and the acknowledgement of its value to the practice of medicine and its benefit to
11 patients.

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13 This report serves as the first instance of a biennial accounting of the activities the AMA has
14 engaged in since 2022 to support independent practices.

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16 DISCUSSION

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18 The AMA’s efforts to promote and advocate for independent practice physicians can be
19 summarized in three key strategic efforts:

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26 The AMA’s newest section, the Private Practice Physicians Section (PPPS), was officially
27 established at the November 2020 Special Meeting of the HOD and held its first meeting in
28 conjunction with the June 2021 Special Meeting of the HOD. Though certainly not the only unit
29 within the Association working on behalf of independent practices, the PPPS is the primary vehicle
30 for addressing the concerns of private practice physicians within the HOD, thus helping to ensure
31 that independent practice concerns are considered when determining policy.

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33 The PPPS maintains a roster of 367 certified members. Membership is open to any AMA member
34 who is in a practice consisting of 50 or fewer physicians and in which the physicians maintain a
35 controlling interest in the practice. Physicians must independently elect to join the section; they are
36 not at this time proactively asked if they want to join, though they are made aware of the Section’s
37 existence. Membership in the PPPS has grown significantly since 2022, with the Section adding 53
38 new members in 2022 (+20%), and 44 new members in 2023 (+14%).

1 The Section has held formal Business Meetings at all AMA Annual and Interim meetings since
2 June of 2021. Attendance has been strong, fluctuating between approximately 40 and 60 members
3 attending each meeting. The PPPS has advanced 18 resolutions to the House of Delegates since the
4 2022 Annual Meeting on topics such as reexamining laws around physician self-referrals, limiting
5 corporate ownership of private practices, improving Medicare reimbursement, and developing
6 guidelines for the use of virtual and overseas administrative assistants, among many others.

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8 The AMA has championed issues important to private practice in its advocacy efforts, particularly
9 at the federal level. Key among these issues is reforming Medicare payment rates to ensure
10 practices can continue to thrive. The AMA believes the need to stop the annual cycle of pay cuts
11 and patches and enact permanent Medicare payment reforms could not be clearer. The AMA was
12 successful in getting Congress to introduce H.R. 2474, the Strengthening Medicare for Patients and
13 Provider Act, which would provide automatic, annual payment updates to account for inflation as
14 reflected in the Medicare Economic Index (MEI). The AMA and our Physician Grassroots
15 Network and Patient Advocacy Network consider the passage of H.R. 2474 to be among its highest
16 priorities.

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18 The AMA is also engaging directly with federal decision-makers on fixing prior authorization,
19 limiting scope creep, supporting telehealth, surprise billing, and protecting against government
20 intrusion in areas such as abortion care and gender-affirming care. The AMA has submitted
21 comments on the Federal Trade Commission’s proposed rule on noncompete agreements and
22 Department of Justice antitrust merger guidelines. The AMA also advocates before Congress and
23 the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that the Stark exemption for physician-owned
24 hospitals needs to be restored.

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26 The cyber security attack on Change Healthcare in March 2024 has left many independent
27 physician practices struggling to stay on top of their operations. The AMA is working closely with
28 members who have experienced disruptions to share instructions for getting federal emergency
29 funds, guides for managing impact, and connecting physicians’ experiences directly to the United
30 States Department of Justice.

31 32 *Outreach to Independent Physicians*

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34 For the past three years, the PPPS has hosted a virtual Private Practice Townhall each March or
35 April, serving as an open forum for independent physician members to raise issues they may be
36 experiencing in their practices and share ideas for addressing them. The Townhall not only
37 provides valuable real-world intelligence about the issues private practices are experiencing to the
38 leadership of the PPPS, but it also affords an opportunity for physicians to connect as peers to share
39 tips and best practices. Additionally, the Townhall typically inspires ideas for education sessions at
40 PPPS Business Meetings as well as generates new policy proposals.

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42 The PPPS has also collaborated with the AMA’s Professional Satisfaction and Practice
43 Sustainability (PS2) team. The two are currently planning a private practice “bootcamp” to be held
44 in advance of the 2024 Annual Meeting. The “bootcamp” will be a multi-hour training session on
45 the business of private practice, giving attendees opportunities to better understand how to
46 effectively manage their business while continuing to provide care to patients. The program stems
47 from ideas raised in previous PPPS Townhalls as well as open discussions at PPPS Business
48 Meetings and other AMA events.

1 *Promoting Resources for the Advancement of Independent Practices*

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3 The AMA's STEPS Forward® initiative, part of its Innovation Academy, has made a suite of
4 interactive open-access resources tailored for independent practices available through the AMA
5 EdHub™, many of which are available for continuing medical education credit. These include
6 podcasts, toolkits, and webinars available online to members and non-members.

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8 Specifically, STEPS Forward® has crafted a series of tools and materials designed to help
9 physicians who are either new to private practice or who simply seek to better operationalize their
10 practice. Key examples include:

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- 12 • 7 STEPS to Starting a Private Practice visual guide
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- 14 • Private Practice Playbook – a repository of sample forms including a model new patient
15 packet, routine patient documents such as medical release and patient payment plans,
16 administrative documents such as refund requests and medication logs, employee
17 documents for job descriptions and expense reimbursement, and new hire documents such
18 as model confidentiality agreements and drug screen consent forms.
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20 Independent physicians who are AMA members also have access to a range of experiential
21 sessions in the form of webinars to help physicians better capitalize on their practices' regular
22 financial and operational tasks. This programming is offered through the AMA's Private Practice
23 Simple Solutions sessions, of which 17 programs have been offered since 2022. Key examples of
24 programming for independent practices include sessions on practice marketing, conducting market
25 research to better understand the needs of the community, public relations and establishing
26 community trust, and maximizing referral strategies. These programs are operated and promoted by
27 the AMA's PS2 team.

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29 The PPPS has offered additional educational programming at its Annual and Interim meetings.
30 Designed and curated to address issues that PPPS members most frequently raise as key issues for
31 their practice, the Section routinely works with internal and external subject matter experts to share
32 strategies and information to attendees. Recent examples of educational sessions offered at PPPS
33 meetings include a legal analysis of employment contracting from the perspective of both the
34 employer and employee, an unpacking of innovative business model strategies from three different
35 independent physician practices, a strategic assessment of methods for transitioning a practice, and
36 a breakdown of best practices for branding and marketing.

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38 **CONCLUSION**

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40 The AMA continues to be mindful of the rate of change in the physician practice setting with
41 greater numbers of physicians opting to leave private practice each year. The strategies and
42 initiatives outlined here represent the foundations the AMA will build upon to continue to ensure
43 that independent physician practices have the support they need to thrive. The AMA will continue
44 to promote the resources it has while expanding its menu of services and tools geared toward
45 physicians in private practice.