

Report #15 Committee on Communications

To: Minnesota Medical Association House of Delegates  
Convening September 17, 2008

In its communications efforts, the MMA works to support the organization's advocacy goals and to showcase physicians as leaders in the health care debate, champions of quality, advocates for a healthy Minnesota, and leaders in their community.

The MMA measures its news results by calendar year. In 2007, there were 211 news articles highlighting MMA positions on significant topics, six MMA-written op/eds published, and 26 positive op/eds naming the MMA. Eight-seven articles quoted MMA leaders. Broadcast coverage included 11 radio interviews and 10 television appearances by MMA leaders.

The MMA focused media attention on the MMA's goals for health care reform and use of the Health Care Access Fund; the MMA's ranking of pay-for-performance programs; quality measurement; and Medicare reimbursement.

**Health Care Reform.** The MMA worked to build support for the health care reform bill, which moved Minnesota closer to the MMA's vision for reform. MMA leaders were frequently interviewed on Minnesota Public Radio, articles quoting MMA leaders were published in newspapers throughout the state, and editorials in major newspapers were favorable. The MMA's objections to proposed cuts to the state's health and human services budget and raids of the Health Care Access Fund were publicized on radio and in newspapers.

**Medicare.** Since our last communications report to the House of Delegates, the MMA, AMA, and Minnesota Senior Federation teamed up to gain publicity about the impact of scheduled Medicare payment cuts on seniors. The AMA/MMA House Calls effort resulted in television, radio, and newspaper coverage and a very favorable editorial. Leaders of all three organizations spoke at a news conference, a news release warned that "Medicare Cuts to Physicians Will Harm Minnesota Seniors," and representatives from the MMA visited the editorial boards of the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, and the Rochester *Post Bulletin*. As a result, a favorable editorial appeared in the *Star Tribune*, and MMA and AMA leaders were interviewed on Minnesota Public Radio's "All Things Considered" feature and by WCCO radio and Minnesota News Network. Fox 9 TV News broadcast coverage of the news conference.

**Support for Freedom to Breathe.** When the statewide ban on smoking in Minnesota workplaces took effect October 1, the MMA thanked legislators and presented them with certificates of appreciation. Positive local news articles highlighted the new law and enhanced relationships with legislators who helped with its passage. The MMA issued a news release applauding the Department of Health for its decision to shut down fake "theatrical performances" in bars, which violated the Freedom to Breathe Act.

**Pay for Performance.** The MMA sent its pay for performance report along with *Minnesota Medicine* to all members and promoted it on the website. In addition, the MMA issued a news release saying, “Pay for Performance Programs Fall Short,” which led to articles quoting MMA leaders in major newspapers.

**Quality of Care.** The MMA published the *MMA Quality Review*, a quarterly publication, which covered topics such as pay for performance, electronic health records, and communication during patient handoffs. “Quality Rounds” in *Minnesota Medicine* also provides insight into quality improvement efforts in Minnesota. The Quality section of the MMA website links to resources that help physicians continuously improve the care they provide to patients. The MMA also presents awards that recognize Minnesota physicians for leadership in advancing quality and safety in health care.

The MMA’s website, [www.mmaonline.net](http://www.mmaonline.net), has a section devoted to quality issues that includes links to important resources. In addition, there is a regular feature, “Quality Rounds” in *Minnesota Medicine*.

The MMA publicized an informed-consent form, developed by the Minnesota Alliance for Patient Safety (MAPS), which is designed to be used by health care organizations statewide. The MAPS form is written at a fourth-grade reading level that a majority of patients can understand.

MAPS, spearheaded by the MMA, the Minnesota Hospital Association, and the Minnesota Department of Health, also continued to promote My Medicine List, which allows patients to list all the medicines, vitamins, and herbal remedies they use.

### **MMA House of Delegates Resolutions**

**R. 100. The Establishment of a Panel to address the Medical Needs of Minnesota’s Military** “Coming Home,” “A Cry for Help,” was published in the December 2007, *Minnesota Medicine* and “Help Returning Soldiers Get Proper Care” was published in February 2008.

**R. 106. Awareness of Tricare Health Insurance.** An article about Tricare, including information on how to participate, was published in the August MMA News section of *Minnesota Medicine*. Information about Tricare was also added to Resources for Physicians on the MMA website.

**R. 301. Removal of Artificial Trans Fatty Acids.** A scientific article on the dangers of trans fatty acids is scheduled for the October issue of *Minnesota Medicine*. Around the time the article is published, the MMA will send a letter to health care facilities encouraging them to remove trans fats from food served to patients and staff and will send out a news release to generate media attention.

**R. 313 Drowsy Driving.** An article about the Wake Up and Sleep campaign with resources that are available for employers whose employees work shifts or unusual hours was published in the September MMA News section of *Minnesota Medicine*. A link to

the resources is posted on the MMA website. An article on drowsy driving is also planned for the December 2008 *Minnesota Medicine*.

**R. 410. Protecting the Medical Home.** In an effort to provide more explicit information in MMA communications about how MMA members may contact the MMA to express concerns, share problems, and raise issues about the medical home, the MMA has included comment forms in its articles about the medical home and encourages physicians to report problems and offer comments.

### News for Physicians

**MMAOnline.net.** The MMA introduced its redesigned website, [www.mmaonline.net](http://www.mmaonline.net), in October. It won an award for communications excellence from the Midwest Society of Association Executives. The award was presented at the MSAE's annual meeting in St. Paul in May. The website competed against dozens of other association sites in the region. Judges in the competition cited the site's ease of navigation, its overall attractiveness, and the depth of its information. New features on the website include a Physician Career Center, where physicians can post their resumes and clinics can recruit physicians; a calendar of events and CME opportunities; and resources for physicians. Find A Physician allows visitors to search for physicians by name, gender, location, specialty, and clinic. The site also features breaking health care news, advocacy tips, and more. If you haven't seen it yet, visit [www.mmaonline.net](http://www.mmaonline.net)

**MMA News Now.** To keep physicians up to date on health care news and to encourage them to visit the MMA website, the MMA sends out an email newsletter, *MMA News Now*. Short articles link readers back to the website, where they can read the whole story. Any physician who is not receiving the free newsletter is encouraged to sign up for it at [www.mmaonline.net](http://www.mmaonline.net).

***The MMA Physician Advocate*,** a two-color monthly news publication, provides MMA members with information on MMA advocacy and other health care news during the legislative session.

***Minnesota Medicine*,** the monthly journal of the MMA, provides practical information as well as incisive political, economic, and public health articles. This year *Minnesota Medicine* received six awards from the Minnesota Magazine and Publishers Association: the Gold Award for best feature article for "Take a Number," about the shortage of psychiatric beds, in January 2007; the Bronze Award for the feature article, "Change of Pace," in November 2006; the Gold Award for best single-topic issue for "Of Mice and Medicine," in April 2007, an issue exploring the use of animals in medical research; the Gold Award for best technical article for "Cool Tools," a look at applications that can make it easier to get up-to-date medical information in November 2006, the Bronze Award for Overall Excellence, and the Silver Award for the best media kit, a packet of materials used to sell advertising.

In addition Howard Bell, a frequent contributor to *Minnesota Medicine*, received the Michael E. DeBakey Journalism Award for his article "Of Mice and Medicine," on the topic of animal research, which appeared in the April 2007 issue of *Minnesota Medicine*.

The award recognizes outstanding journalism "that discusses the essential role of humane animal research in medical discoveries and scientific breakthroughs."

### **Physician Visibility**

The MMA generated publicity for individual physician members by sending news releases to their local papers when they join a committee, the Board of Trustees, or a task force, or when they attend the AMA meeting.

### **Media Relations**

The MMA fielded hundreds of phone calls from reporters who wanted help in developing health care articles. MMA staff provided background information and set up interviews with physician leaders. To encourage accurate health care reporting, the MMA presents awards for excellence in medical journalism at the MMA Annual Meeting.

I have enjoyed the opportunity to serve as chair of the MMA Committee on Communications. The committee includes the following members: Jaspreet Dhaliwal, M.D.; Neal Holtan, M.D.; Michael Huska, M.D.; Stephen MacLeod, M.D.; Samuel Marquez, M.D.; Farrah Mateen, M.D.; Kevin Murphy, M.D.; Judith Shank, M.D.; Stuart Sherry, M.D.; Vernon Sommerdorf, M.D.; Amy Williams, M.D.; Maria Carrow, medical student; Kristina Colbenson, medical student; and Keith Murphy, resident. Lorrie Holmgren staffs the committee.

Judith Shank, M.D.  
Chair