



Building Physician Community Leadership

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



By Richard J.D. Pan, MD, MPH

"The work of volunteer groups throughout our country represents the very heart and soul of America. They have helped make this the most compassionate, generous, and humane society that ever existed on the face of this earth."

— Ronald Reagan

SSVMS IS LOOKING FOR GOOD PHYSICIANS who will volunteer their time on government and non-profit boards, and will participate in the political process to build healthier communities. As an association of physicians, our medical society is only as strong as our members, and we are counting on your help to make us stronger.

To achieve these objectives, your Board held a retreat to develop strategies for increasing the influence of physicians and your medical society in local and state affairs. We invited three local leaders — Helen Thomson, Yolo County Supervisor and former state Assembly member; David Sanders, City Council member of Rancho Cordova; and Marian Washburn, City Council member and past-Mayor of Placerville — to frankly discuss how physicians and the medical society are perceived in the community and their suggestions on achieving our goals.

Physicians are among the public's most trusted groups, but are not seen as active participants in local government. Local governments make many decisions that influence health, ranging from county health services for the indigent and county health department activities to parks and recreation and land use.

Yet, physicians rarely serve on local boards or commissions or testify before city councils or county boards of supervisors. Our guests listed numerous local opportunities where physician participation would be welcomed. In addition, SSVMS is examining how we can be better informed about local activities in all three counties.

Your Board also discussed greater involvement by physicians in local political activities. Currently, SSVMS interviews candidates for local state legislative districts and congressional districts in partnership with CALPAC.

Almost all legislators, however, began their political careers in local government, and SSVMS would be much more influential if our society could build relationships between physicians and local government and community leaders.

As noted already, physicians are needed to serve on local government and non-profit boards where they can interact with local leaders and influence local decision-making. In addition, physicians should be more active in local political activities.

Campaigning for public office, even for school board as well as city council or county supervisor, requires significant commitments of time and money. To finance an election, candidates have to be willing to put even their homes at risk.

While few physicians are willing to run for office, we physicians can invest in our future

political leaders by holding fundraisers and volunteering in local campaigns.

These early relationships provide enormous opportunities for physicians to educate our current and future political leaders about the challenges of medical practice and the importance of health.

SSVMS is working to promote community leadership in our physician community. We know from our many SPIRIT and Adopt-A-School volunteers that SSVMS physicians are willing to step up to the challenge of building a stronger community. We also know that SSVMS members are involved in community leadership, but we have not recognized their participation and leadership. Finally, we believe that there are many physicians who would become more involved but have not been asked to serve.

Therefore, to learn more about you, our membership, we are posting a brief online survey about your community involvement. If you have not already completed the survey, please e-mail SSVMS at info@ssvms.org to receive a direct link to the survey. In addition, we will be identifying opportunities for physician involvement in local government and non-profit boards and seeking members to nominate for these positions. If you already serve, please let us know so we can recognize your contributions.

SSVMS is also exploring strategies to encourage and facilitate member participation in local political activities. SSVMS does not endorse individual candidates; however, our facilities are available for member-sponsored events. We also plan to disseminate more information about local candidates to the membership.

Our country was built on the efforts of volunteers striving to build strong and compassionate communities. The founders of our medical society understood this and played prominent roles in their community. We too must strive to build a healthier community through our own commitment to community leadership. Thank you for your help.

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