

Valedictory Speech  
WMA General Assembly  
London, UK (virtual)  
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Thank you, Dr. Montgomery. Dr. Kloiber, officers, Council and Assembly members and our JDN and Associate members. Let me start by thanking you again for the great privilege of serving as your president for this past year. It has been one of the most unusual and challenging years the WMA and our profession has ever faced. Due to the pandemic, this is now the second General Assembly we have found necessary to hold virtually and the fourth Committee and Council sessions.

Although conducting our WMA business virtually is bad enough, the pandemic has kept us apart for many more NMA meetings, scientific conferences, and from many opportunities to be together to share a time of friendship and productive discussions outside of the formal business sessions. I know we all hope we will be able to start meeting together again soon – both to conduct our business and to keep our relationships with one another strong.

In my inaugural remarks a year ago, I stated that “It is in times like these that our fellow physicians and our patients need our leadership more than ever.” I went on to say that “We need strong physician organizations at every level: the WMA, our NMAs and state and local medical societies.” This year, I have been proud to see that strong leadership in action in the work that you have done. I’ve seen the Indian Medical Association raise funds for their colleagues impacted by COVID, speak out against violence directed at health care workers, and resist expansion medical practice by persons without medical training. I have seen the Turkish Medical Association advocate for members wrongfully imprisoned and fight to retain recognition of their Association. I have seen the Korean Medical Association speak out against intrusion of the government into the operating theater. I’ve seen physician leaders in

Nicaragua and Egypt speak out against oppression and threats against physicians in their countries.

These are but a few of the many examples of NMAs advocating for their members and for their patients. In all of these situations, the WMA was right there with these NMAs and physicians supporting them in their struggle to protect physicians and deliver high quality care to their patients. That is leadership ... and that shows the importance of our professional organizations and the WMA.

In spite of the pandemic, many association meetings, scientific meetings and advocacy meetings were held virtually, and the WMA participated in many of them. In addition to NMA meetings, the WMA participated in multiple meetings related to various aspects of the pandemic including the recently completed meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Academy for Life at the Vatican in Rome at which we were invited to give the physician's perspective on the impact of the pandemic. We participated in several conferences on equitable distribution of vaccines and on the need to improve our ongoing response to this pandemic and our planning for the next.

WMA leadership participated in other conferences including ones on the contemporary relevance of bioethics, medical ethics and professionalism, person centered medicine, violence against physicians and health care, and on the role of health professionals in encouraging adherence to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. So, in spite of the limitations of the pandemic, the WMA has continued to be a strong and recognized voice for physicians around the world.

The Scientific Sessions associated with our General Assembly meetings continue to be important forums for international discussion of key issues facing medicine. The session in September on the ethical challenges of organ donation and transplantation processes coordinated by the General Council of Official Medical Colleges of Spain and last week's session on antimicrobial resistance coordinated by the British Medical Association were both excellent sessions and brought together experts from around the world to present and discuss these critical and timely topics.

We have a responsibility as a profession to engage in scientific sessions like these and the many others in which you and the WMA are involved to address the challenges we face in many areas of science, medicine, and ethics. I commend those who organize such scientific session for helping us fulfill that responsibility to our physician colleagues, to our patients, and to society.

Because the WMA is recognized as having broad involvement in activities such as those I have just mentioned and very specifically in recognition of physicians' work and sacrifice around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, the WMA received the "Golden Arrow 2021" award last January at the 18<sup>th</sup> Vienna Congress co-hosted by the Medical Doctor's Association of Austria. The WMA was the first organization to receive that prestigious award previously awarded only to individuals.

In my remarks to that group, I told them "there are many physicians around the world who do not feel appreciated or supported for the risk they have taken or the sacrifices they have made in caring for patients with COVID. Many are demoralized. Many feel their governments, and, in some cases, their hospitals have let them down. Some feel taken for granted or even taken advantage of.

This Golden Arrow award proclaims to the physicians of the world – You are appreciated. We recognize all you have done and thank you for the sacrifices you have made." I think physicians need to hear that. I think you need to hear that. It is our job as leaders to make sure our physicians know we are proud of them and that their efforts and their sacrifice are appreciated.

I am also proud of the important work you continue to do on the issues on our agenda at this meeting... continued work on revising the international code of medical ethics... addressing racism in medicine... emphasizing women's right to healthcare... advocating for access to medications and vaccines... improving our principles on end-of-life care... and multiple statements related to improving patient safety and specific areas of medical care. Thank you for the time and energy you devote to this work.

Before my closing comment, I want to sincerely thank Dr. Kloiber, Sunny, Clarisse, Magda and all our staff at the WMA for the tremendous work they do on our behalf and the support they

give WMA leadership as we represent the organization. Thank you. I also thank the American Medical Association again for their confidence and support in nominating me for this position 2 years ago. And finally, a loving thank-you to my wife, Debbie, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement during the many years I have served in our professional organizations. Thank you, Debbie.

In my inaugural speech a year ago, I included a quote by American baseball legend Babe Ruth. He said, "It's hard to beat a person who never gives up." We must never give up in our efforts to advance our policies and our work to achieve our common goals. We must never fail to advocate on behalf of patients and physicians. I know that Drs. Stensmyren and Enabulele will do that as your elected leaders. I know that Drs. Montgomery and Kloiber will do that in their respective roles. I am confident that you will also leave our meeting this week encouraged and inspired by the actions we have taken, and that each of you will use the WMA resolutions, statements, and declarations in your countries to support your physicians and accomplish our common goal and the WMA's purpose of achieving "the highest international standards in medicine...and health care for all people in the world."

Thank you very much.