August 1, 2020

TOMA Members:

It’s August! Summer is rolling along, and we’ve had a very eventful month since my last letter to you.

We are thrilled that Dr. Thomas L. Ely, a TOMA member and past president, was inaugurated as the 124th president of the American Osteopathic Association at the virtual 100th AOA House of Delegates. The inauguration ceremony featured our own Dr. Don Polk as the master of ceremonies and Dr. Ely’s inaugural address (which you can view on the AOA website); I was privileged to provide the invocation for the inaugural ceremony. You will find a separate message from Dr. Ely after my monthly letter.

The AOA House of Delegates featured the usual resolutions, Board of Trustees election and appropriate reports. TOMA was well represented by Dr. Don Polk, who served as proxy for our delegation. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Director of NIAID, gave a personal report to the AOA House of Delegates attendees (which is also available for viewing on the AOA website).

The COVID-19 pandemic is still with us, as you all know. A few key points you should know:

1) The FDA has granted emergency use authorization for rapid point-of-care COVID-19 antigen testing in authorized CLIA certified labs.
2) HHS and the Department of Defense are collaborating with Novavax to demonstrate commercial scale manufacture of an investigational COVID-19 vaccine.
3) It remains critically important that we all stay up to date on COVID-19 related developments – the AOA Morning Brief is a great source of such information, such as the fact that 40% of adults in the USA have at least one underlying condition that puts them at risk for COVID-19 related complications.
4) Young, healthy adults and teens with mild COVID-19 may take 3 weeks or more to recover, reporting persistent fatigue and shortness of breath.
5) The importance of wearing masks, as part of an overall disease protection strategy cannot be over-emphasized – along with physical distancing and frequent handwashing and sanitizing, since a mask that doesn’t filter air doesn’t provide complete protection from viral exposure. (Please note the related video which may be helpful for patient education purposes).

Due to the increasing number of cases of COVID-19 in Tennessee, we suggest our members participate in local advocacy with officials for a requirement to wear masks in public to attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19 in Tennessee – other than again shutting down portions of our economy, the wearing of masks and social/physical distancing and proper hand hygiene are the only known practical ways to slow the virus at this time. The capacity of many of our state’s hospitals (esp. ERs and critical care units) are being
stressed now, and this may get worse, so this is particularly important in counties with high new case numbers.

In addition to these and other COVID-19 related issues, TOMA remained active on your behalf in the following areas during the past month:

1) TOMA and several other state associations, along with the AOA, have collaborated to get the deadline for providers who participate in Medicaid and CHIP programs to apply for funds from the federal government through the Provider Relief Fund extended to 8/3/2020 (yet another membership benefit)

2) TOMA continues to work on your behalf to advocate for Tennessee DOs and other physicians on issues related to, among other things, attempts at scope of practice expansion by allied and other limited scope health professionals, balance billing, use of telehealth as one piece of a coordinated way to provide health care with reimbursement on par with that of comparable in-person services, and the repeal of the Tennessee Professional Privilege Tax.

3) Our Education and Convention Committees have continued to meet and planning for the 2021 Convention is well under way. You’ll hear more about this in future communications.

TOMA stands with you on all these issues, as we work to weather the COVID-19 storm and limit its impact upon our patients’ lives (and our own), the economy of our counties and state (and beyond), and on numerous other issues of concern to Tennessee’s DOs. We will continue to work unilaterally and with other organizations to try to influence legislative and policy-making efforts related to the practice of medicine in Tennessee and to optimize the quality, safety, cost of, and access to great care in our state and to protect our profession from regulatory changes that would compromise our effectiveness and relationships with our patients and that might add to our already heavy administrative obligations.

I hope this finds you and your families well, that you remain safe and healthy and that you can still enjoy some of the many things that make summer a favorite season. Please join me in congratulating Dr. Ely on his election to our profession’s highest office and in pledging TOMA’s united and sustained support of him in this role and in thanking Dr. Polk for representing Dr. Ely and TOMA so well at the inauguration.

Best Wishes!

Michael Wieting, DO
President
August 1, 2020

My Fellow Tennessee Osteopathic Physicians:

It is with humility, pride, and a great sense of honor that I greet you as the 124th President of the American Osteopathic Association, the professional home of every U.S. trained osteopathic physician. It is even more rewarding to be able to represent Tennessee in this position.

In my inaugural address I identified three major goals I want to focus on this year, in addition to coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic and social unrest. They were:

1. Expand the Osteopathic Community
   a. Redefine membership value and promote Specialty Society, State Association, and AOA membership
   b. Redefine the AOA brand campaign to reflect greater understanding of our profession

2. Support the Future of Our Profession
   a. Emphasize expansion of osteopathic recognition in GME residencies
   b. Collaborate with SOMA to enhance AOA support of osteopathic medical students

3. Enhance the AOA’s public Health Mission
   a. Identify and have a focused public health initiative during this pandemic
   b. Promote public health research within the osteopathic community
   c. Develop resources to address healthcare disparities

CME and AOA Board Certification
Of course, we will continue to enhance our board certification services. We are moving away from the 7–10 year high stakes recertification exams and three year CME cycle to ongoing continuous education and testing from your homes. Just this week we had one of our osteopathic physicians, stationed in the military in Japan, successfully complete his initial board certification exam remotely, from Japan. We are making AOA certification convenient and cost effective.

As of July 1st, the 5 year transition to a single GME accreditation system was completed, guaranteeing graduating osteopathic physicians access to quality graduate medical education. This year was the first year of the single match and 99.2% of our graduating osteopathic physicians matched.

Advocacy
TOMA and the AOA work tirelessly on behalf of the profession. Since March there have been 6 sign-on letters with more than 40 affiliate societies signing on to each letter that were submitted at the federal level; 8 meetings with U.S. senate offices advocating for affiliate societies since May; and more than 20 state-specific letters were shared. Our Grassroots advocacy has
resulted in more than 10,000 individual communications with lawmakers, and AOA members participated in at least 26 Congressional tele-town halls.

Membership
The osteopathic profession has grown 300% over the past three decades. We now have 127,771 osteopathic physicians and one out of every four medical students in the U.S. are in osteopathic medical schools. We have approximately 1600 osteopathic physicians in Tennessee. Yet only 30% of osteopathic physicians are members of the AOA, and only 9% of Tennessee osteopathic physicians are members of the Tennessee Osteopathic Medical Association. These are number that greatly dishearten me. Your state association, your specialty society, and your national osteopathic association are who represent you, advocate for you, as osteopathic physicians, at the state and national level, and who fights to protect your specialty.

I thank you if you are members and if you are not currently a member, I challenge you join these organizations, for the next two years. Give us a try, see what they do, and participate in the future of your specialty and profession. Let us hear your voice. I am not wanting increased membership for financial reasons. I want to truly represent the entire osteopathic profession, not a segment of the osteopathic profession.

Research and Public Health
It is my desire for the AOA, representing the osteopathic profession, to actively engage all osteopathic physicians and the public this Fall about the value of vaccines and routine immunizations. Everyone should get Flu Shots this Fall and when a COVID-19 vaccine is available they should get that also. I also want us to explore resources to assist is addressing health care disparities.

I apologize for the length of my letter, but I have only scratched the surface of what is going on in osteopathic medicine. I have been an osteopathic physician for forty years, and I assure you “This is not your Granddaddy’s AOA.” I want you to truly be proud that you are an osteopathic physician.

I thank you again for the honor I have to represent the state of Tennessee.

Thomas L. Ely, DO, FACOFP, FAAFP
TElyDO@osteopathic.org