

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# The Case for Membership in the AMA

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The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) lost its American Medical Association (AMA) House of Delegates (HOD) representation in November 2017. Maintenance of HOD representation is contingent on achieving a threshold value of dual AMA/AASM members, a number the AASM failed to meet in the 2017 5-year review. Collectively, the authors have served as your AASM delegation to the AMA HOD for over 2 decades. We write to impress upon AASM leadership and membership the value of AASM representation in the AMA HOD and to encourage AASM members to join the AMA. The AMA provides benefits to individual members and member organizations. Highlighted in this letter are three key selected AMA benefits for organized sleep medicine.

It is important that physicians have a strong national body to represent all of medicine. The AMA is governed as an organization of organizations. Policies are set at meetings of the HOD by representatives of state and specialty societies. The many voices of specialty and state societies are easier to ignore in national politics than the unified voice of the AMA. When legislators and policy makers want the opinion of American physicians, they turn to the AMA.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and private payers base payment on a resource-based relative value scale system. The AMA/Specialty Society Relative Value Units (RVUs) Update Committee (RUC) is a multispecialty committee created by the AMA dedicated to describing the resources required to provide physician services used in developing RVUs. In an age of diminishing reimbursement for medical services, it is vital to have vested physicians who can advocate for fair payment. Lacking representation in the AMA HOD, the AASM loses influence over the RUC and the process that decides payment for services.

The Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) system, developed by the AMA, is used to ensure that health claims are processed properly for CMS and other health programs. Practicing physicians are keenly aware of the value of CPT coding in conducting the business of medicine. The responsibility to maintain the CPT code set is held by the CPT Editorial Panel.

Supporting the Editorial Panel is a larger body of CPT advisors, the CPT Advisory Committee. The members of this committee are primarily physicians nominated by the national medical specialty societies represented in the AMA HOD and AMA Health Care Professionals Advisory Committee. HOD membership allows the AASM direct influence on the CPT Advisory Committee.

As the national professional society representing organized sleep medicine, the AASM must be able to affect AMA policy, the RUC and CPT processes, or accept whatever outcome is derived from the deliberations of these bodies. It is a collective responsibility as sleep specialists to strengthen our professional society's political position to negotiate on behalf of the field. Membership in the AMA is necessary for the AASM to effectively advocate on our behalf. Our message to AASM membership is succinct: join the AMA or be content to sit idly while others decide the fate of sleep medicine.

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