

Growing with the AMA...

The AMA is changing to give you a greater say...

Now is a time of dramatic change in our health system. The good news is the AMA (NSW) is changing to make sure your voice is not lost in the debates that will have a profound influence on how your career develops in the years to come.





A year ago the AMA (NSW) conducted a major survey of its membership as well as doctors who had chosen not to join the Association.

The findings of this survey were stark. Different parts of the profession had different priorities and wanted the AMA to reflect these concerns. Most respondents said they valued the policy and advocacy role the Association played but wanted a greater say in the actual issues the AMA addresses.

We took this as a firm statement from the profession that you wish to maintain the AMA's strong voice in health but also be more involved in our campaigns. We ran with the invitation from you to open up our processes and spend more time talking with you about the issues that matter – essentially giving the agenda back to you.

The AMA (NSW) used this information to shape its priorities over the last 12 months. If you have noticed more opportunities to provide us with information through surveys, that's because we are asking more questions. If you have been invited to take part in more professional events, that's because we are organising more. If you have noticed we are revamping our communications to give you more avenues to get involved in the AMA, that's because we have.

Rather than simply looking at the profession as a monolith we have been designing new agendas and campaigns for key areas of membership – GPs, public hospital specialists and doctors-in-training – while simultaneously reaching-out to the broader public by supporting public health initiatives.

General practice

The AMA (NSW) has been the driving force behind efforts to invigorate the AMA's presence in primary health. With

major national reform occurring we are determined that the role of GPs at the heart of the system not be lost.

In late 2009 the AMA conducted a major research project with the general public, identifying their attitudes to GPs and expectations of primary care. The results were fascinating and have shaped our thinking about where we stand in our patients' eyes. The research reinforced the high regard for family doctors and their central role in diagnostic care. By talking to our members through a series of one-on-one interviews and online focus groups we got a real sense of the pressures GPs are facing, not the least the gradual erosion of Medicare by the failure of successive governments to adequately index the MBS.

The next six months will allow the AMA (NSW) to develop these strategies into fully fledged campaigns. All sections of our membership will have issues to raise at the State Election in March 2011 and – as never before – will have the chance to have their voices heard.

The result of these consultations was that the AMA nationally developed an agenda for 'family doctors' based around key issues such as access, improvements to the MBF and more support for GPs through the expansion of practice nurses. Establishing this forward-thinking agenda has been vital in a dynamic political environment

and allows us to clearly articulate our concerns with issues such as the diabetes plan. This effort crystallised during the federal election where AMA (NSW) members hosted community roundtables with federal election candidates as part of the national 'Support Family Doctors' campaign.

Public hospitals

Too often the interests of doctors are lost in the public health debate with well-oiled government spin machines controlling the flow of information. Determined to give AMA members a voice we have developed a regular feedback-loop with members to ensure the government is held to account.

When the Garling review was released in November 2009 we had already surveyed our members so we could establish the benchmarks on effective reform. Before the State Budget we gave surgeons a chance to put their views before the public. More recently we called for comprehensive feedback from members regarding the federal proposals to create Local Health Networks (LHNs).

The federal process has been a classic example of how the AMA (NSW) new approach can work for members. The changes announced by the Federal Government were comprehensive and far-reaching. They were also set on a time horizon that could see current issues ignored against the promise of long-term reform.

The AMA (NSW) determined a three-stage response to the federal reforms. Firstly, we continued to highlight the urgent need for reform, that change was not an option, highlighting conditions at hospitals like Westmead where surgery is regularly cancelled to manage budgets. Secondly, we explained the impact of the changes to our members

– free of ‘the spin’ – using the pages of *The NSW Doctor* to flesh-out the detail. Finally, we have determined our role is to ensure that frontline care is not compromised and our members have an avenue to report problems before they cost lives.

Alongside the federal reform is an upcoming state election where the AMA (NSW) AMA will present a detailed set of policy priorities to both sides of politics. These policies are close to completion and will be outlined in the next issue of *The NSW Doctor*. We invite all members in the public system to get behind our campaign ‘*Untangle Health*’ – full details next month...

Doctors-in-training

Our members in training are facing particular challenges presently as the Government’s botched workforce planning has created a ‘tsunami’ of graduates seeking limited specialist training. The AMA is playing an important role in advising and guiding young members through this labyrinth.

We are enhancing specialist committees and, significantly, using new organising tools like Facebook to connect with young members and keep them informed about their profession. Creating vibrant online communities gives busy members the chance to participate in the AMA without having to commit time to actually attending meetings and events. We are building ties with NSW medical students, your next generation of members, to give them the best headstart into the profession.

Public health initiatives

The AMA (NSW) has been a vocal participant in several public health initiatives over the past year, notably the *Last Drinks* campaign. Together

with the state’s police officers, nurses and ambulance officers AMA (NSW) members in emergency departments are pressuring the NSW Government to stand-up to the hotel lobby and restrict licensing. Apart from the terrible human cost of alcohol abuse our members know what it means to face drunk and abusive people in emergency departments late at night. We have seen how the situation has worsened as the hotel lobby has convinced the Government to extend trading hours in venues across the state. The fact the Premier has labelled us ‘wowers’ is both offensive to our members and a spur to keep this campaign going all the way through to the State Election.

Where to from here?

The next six months will allow the AMA (NSW) to develop these strategies into fully fledged campaigns. All sections of our membership will have issues to raise at the State Election in March 2011 and – as never before – will have the chance to have their voices heard.

The AMA is preparing to launch *AMA Active*, a special campaign site where members will be kept informed about key policy debates, support our campaigns and send petitions and letters directly to elected representatives. It’s just another way we want to give you a bigger say in how your career and health priorities are delivered to the people of NSW.

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New ways of reaching you

As part of our shift to put members at the centre of everything we do the AMA (NSW) has revamped many of the tools used to communicate with you...

Facebook

A common interest group for all doctors in NSW and friends. AMA (NSW) invites all members to discuss issues or concerns and express common interests.

Webinars

We have used online tools that allow members from remote areas to log-in and watch online presentations of research when they can’t physically make a meeting.

Email bulletins

Regular updates to members with all the latest news from across the AMA.

New website

The AMA (NSW) launched its new website in May 2010 offering members simple access to important information and services as well as the latest media and policy news.

COMING SOON... *AMA Active*

We are currently working on a purpose-built political campaign hub that allows members to have a greater say in AMA (NSW) decisions and take part in the campaigns that matter to them.