President’s Corner – Thomas E. Collins, MD

2020-2021 AMCNO President

“"The greatest reward for doing is the opportunity to do more.””

D r. Jonas Salk

It was early in high school when I came across this quote, written on the back of a Robins Reader (patient information pamphlet distributed by the A.H. Robins pharmaceutical company). For some reason, this quote struck a chord with me and has been a repetitive theme in my personal and professional development throughout my life. It has helped motivate me in attempts to be a positive influence on others, through direct patient care, teaching and mentoring, or operational and strategic planning. I have been incredibly fortunate to be given a wide variety of opportunities to “do more.” Please know that, as President of the Academy of Medicine of Cleveland & Northern Ohio (AMCNO), I am truly grateful for this additional opportunity to do more.

At no time in recent memory has our entire medical community been challenged to do more. Not since physicians united in response to the polio epidemic have we come together against such a threat to our community. Daily, across all aspects of the Cleveland medical landscape, your colleagues are providing care, training and equipping themselves in response to this coronavirus pandemic. Every component of our health systems has pivoted to fulfill the obligations to our community. Representing more than 5,000 physicians, the AMCNO continues to be a foundation of support for the health of Greater Cleveland as this crisis evolves.

We are experiencing conformational change in medicine right now. The current pandemic, coupled with the influences of technology and the continued desire for value in health care, is redefining how the relationship between the physician and patient occurs. It is likely that the practice of medicine will never quite look the same again.

What role does the AMCNO play in all of this? It has always been a part of the response structure during crisis in northern Ohio. Since many physicians now are employed members of large health systems, the AMCNO brings forward the key perspective of the physician-patient relationship without the necessary untoward effects of the hyper-competitive healthcare market that exists.

The AMCNO serves all of you and the community in many ways, including advocacy, education, mentoring, and communication. A few key examples include First Year Cleveland, the Northeast Ohio Hospital Opioid Consortium, the Mini-Internship program and the Academy of Medicine Education Foundation (which, among other supportive efforts, offers scholarships for local medical students). Take time to read the information that you receive from the AMCNO and see how you can become involved and what is important to your practice and life.

This will be a pivotal year in the AMCNO’s history, for many reasons. Our esteemed Executive Vice President and CEO, Elayne Biddlestone, has announced her retirement after 40 years of dedicated and selfless service to the physicians of northern Ohio. We will be embarking on a search for her replacement with current and past members of the AMCNO’s leadership team. We will also be transitioning the staff to a new office space, which should be completed by the end of the year.

It is certainly easy to be overwhelmed by all this change. But it is equally important to have perspective and remember what grounds you. Since 1824, throughout its many iterations, your AMCNO has kept at its core the importance of supporting physicians and advocating for our patients. Our 200th anniversary is right around the corner, and we are all looking forward to celebrating the AMCNO’s many, many accomplishments.

Question-and-Answer Session with Dr. Thomas Collins

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR PRACTICE

I have had the privilege of practicing Emergency Medicine at MetroHealth since I finished my residency here in 1996. We have a truly incredible staff of dedicated nurses, medics, techs, and other talented support staff. We are an academic Emergency Department, with 39 emergency medicine residents, and I am an Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Part of my practice also includes patient care that is given outside of the hospital by the paramedics, EMTs, firefighters, and even police in the City of Cleveland, all of whom are members of Cleveland’s Department of Public Safety. When I am not involved in clinical care or academics, I spend time serving as Medical Director for the Office of Professional Affairs, focusing on medical staff credentialing, privileges, and faculty development.

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN MEDICINE?

I had early exposure to medicine through my father, who was a cardiologist. Although I went to college intending to be a chemist, it was my experience as a firefighter and paramedic that diverted my trajectory and led to my pursuit of medicine. All in all, I spent seven years in the fire service and still rely on many of the EMS and fire service habits that I have carried with me into medicine.

WHAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I am most proud of my family, of course. Katherine and I have five kids; two in college, two out of college and one in high school. Professionally, I am incredibly proud of the men and women of Cleveland EMS and Cleveland Fire. I have had the privilege of being their medical director for 22 years, and it has been a wonderful journey. In 2018, we started an ACGME-accredited EMS fellowship and are currently training our second fellow.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES AND INTERESTS?

Spending time with family, moving kids in and out of college, and traveling to warmer climates.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR AMCNO THIS YEAR?

I think my main priority will be helping the board leadership identify a successor to Executive Vice President and CEO Elayne Biddlestone, who has announced her retirement. We have had the great fortune of having such a knowledgeable and steadfast leader for the last 40 years. Additionally, we will need to have a strong voice with our legislators to help guide them through rapid change related to the coronavirus pandemic.

WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF HEALTH CARE?

I think we’re having intensive change in health care right now, with the current pandemic rapidly modifying how patients and physicians interact. We need to have intentional focus on rules, laws, regulations, and reimbursement guidelines that are rapidly changing in response to the pandemic and how that relates to the overall delivery of health care and our relationship with our patients.

HOW WOULD YOU ASK PHYSICIANS TO SUPPORT THE AMCNO?

This is your organization. I guarantee that every one of you could find an aspect of the AMCNO’s activities that resonate in one of your own core personal values. Get involved and support what you believe in. You don’t have to get involved in everything, but pick one thing and contribute your talent.

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