

## INAUGURAL ADDRESS

John J. Ring, M. D., was inaugurated as the 146th President of the American Medical Association on Wednesday, June 26. Following is his Inaugural Address:

### The Right Road for Medicine: Professionalism and the New AMA

This is a wondrous moment. As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a doctor. I love being a doctor. I love this profession. I love my work with the American Medical Association.

For several months, I wondered about what I would say tonight. And then one day not long ago, it came to me. It was a sunny day in early June. My wife and I were driving into Chicago, and we had to chart our course into the city rather carefully because there is a lot of construction this time of year. So it is hard to avoid delays, rough roads and gaping problems.

We decided to come into the city on Ohio Street instead of going right into the Loop. As we drove east on Ohio, traffic became heavy, and reaching Dearborn we looked out to see the half demolished AMA building that stood at Five-Thirty-Five.

It was a sorry sight — the twisted girders and dusty rubble, the dangling light fixtures, the rooms and stairways open to the air for the first time in eighty-five years. It made me a little sad, and, when I looked over at Anne, I could see she felt the same way.

We crossed Dearborn, got about a half a block, and traffic stopped again. We looked out and rising — as if out of the wrecked remnant of our previous building — the new AMA building suddenly appeared, gleaming blue, gray and silver in the bright sunlight. The metaphor struck us both at the same time: The new rising out of the old. And I knew what I would say to you tonight.

It is a simple message but one that deserves some reflection. There are many pathways a professional association can choose for itself. None is without roadblocks. None is easy. None is sure. But if we chart our course carefully, understand the risks and persevere, we will get to where we want to go. And we will have some wonderful moments along the way.

Because of the path we have charted for ourselves in the past few difficult years, the American Medical Association is now a new association, built on the prodigious strengths of our previous history, ready to remedy what deficiencies there may have been, ready to meet the challenges we have before us now.

I believe the course the new AMA has chosen is the right road for medicine: the course of professionalism, of patient advocacy and of personal sacrifice. It is the way of helping all doctors be better doctors — not necessarily richer, not necessarily more powerful, not necessarily more authoritative — but better doctors.

As a result, what you see now is a more open AMA, a less confrontational AMA, an AMA that is willing to listen to everyone's point of view. What you see now is an AMA that has examined its values and sharpened its focus to emphasize education, ethics and patient welfare, and to represent American medicine as a friend to those it serves.

The new AMA is a confluence of professionals whose clear agenda is the health of the American people. America's doctors are the American Medical Association, and it is time we prove to America, in deed as well

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as word, that we are a doctor's organization, working for the good of our patients, rather than a pressure group aiming for political power as a way to build organizational predominance, to create personal prestige or to line our own pockets.

At the new AMA, we hold everything we do to the litmus test of beneficence towards patients. Medicine is about taking care of sick people. It is about helping all Americans lead healthier and more productive lives. It is about being good, ethical professionals. And we must preserve, protect and promote medicine's professionalism.

By professionalism, I mean that dedication to competence, compassion and moral accountability that has characterized the best doctors in every era since Hippocrates. Professionalism is, to us doctors, our very identity as doctors. And the basic act of professionalism is a doctor looking after a patient: the doctor-patient relationship.

We can accept nothing that threatens this relationship by trying to turn medicine into a mere trade, a dispassionate business venture, an impersonal public utility. We can accept nothing that threatens this relationship by maneuvering us to work for anyone other than our patients. We can accept nothing that threatens this relationship by trying to make us agents of any effort that would violate our duty "to do no harm" — by asking us to ration needed care, to assist in suicide, or to kill people — even in state sanctioned executions.

One of the strongest indications we have that the new AMA is committed to the right course is that the path of professionalism — of putting our patients first — has led us to an unequivocal set of initiatives concerning access to care. Health Access America, for which our beloved "Tup" has carried the banner brilliantly, is a wonderful success because the federation got behind it with new spirit, new realism, new energy, propelled by the new AMA.

And just last month, a JAMA special issue on access brought the AMA to the world's attention with Doctor Todd and Doctor Lundberg showing clearly that we are not afraid to set off on a rough road of controversy, when it is the right thing to do.

The new AMA announces that, "It is no longer acceptable — morally, ethically or economically — for so many of our people to be medically uninsured or seriously underinsured." The new AMA proclaims: "We can solve this problem."

And problem it is! More than 30 million of our fellow citizens are suffering the effects of a total lack of health insurance. Our profession is responsible for their medical care. So I pledge to you tonight that as your President, I will work to put together, this year, a coalition of business, labor and consumers, to effect meaningful health care reform.

Health Access America, the journals' focus on access, a coalition of business, labor and consumers: these initiatives mean we are already a long way down the right road for medicine. But now we approach another crossroad, and we must choose again.

In one of the early JAMA articles that set our course on access, Dr. David Hilfiker wrote, "Medicine is quickly changing from a servant profession into a business." Access is a symbol. The uninsured are the tip of the iceberg.

The real issue is: Are we a profession to which business interest is incidental, or are we a business to which our professionalism is incidental? Are we entrepreneurs or servants? Are we providers or healers? Are we vendors or care-givers? If we choose the right road, we choose the road of responsible professionalism and personal sacrifice.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "No sacrifice is worth the name unless it is a joy."

All this week, we have seen that kind of joy in the caring face of Dr. Kenneth Haller, from East St. Louis, Illinois, a pediatrician who has chosen the hard but fulfilling path of serving children in one of the most depressed inner-city environments in our country.

All this week we have seen that same kind of inner joy in the radiant face of Dr. Aliza Lifshitz, from Los Angeles, who was one of the first Hispanic doctors to serve HIV-positive patients.

All this week, we have seen that same kind of deep spiritual joy in the concerned face of Dr. Kevin Fullin of Kenosha, Wisconsin, who tirelessly led the way to get his state to begin a hospital-based program that helps battered women break the cycle of violence that can maim and kill.

These three AMA members are the doctors we salute in the new ads that have been on exhibit during this Annual Meeting. And, I genuinely hope that just as you have seen the joy of sacrifice in their faces this week, each of you sees that same kind of joy in the mirror every morning.

To be an AMA doctor is to be a special kind of doctor: the kind of doctor who sacrifices for our patients' good, the kind of doctor all doctors should want to be, the kind of doctor all Americans should want their doctors to be.

Yes, being a doctor means sacrifices. Yet it is certain that as we willingly sacrifice for the good of our patients, we gain in public esteem, we gain in self-respect, we gain in the power of our professionalism to serve our patients as they should be served. This is what it is to be a doctor, and this is what it always must be.

I began these remarks by telling you about a day we made a simple choice of which road to take. I would like to close by asking you, the leaders of American medicine, as you choose the road ahead — individually, for the societies you represent, for all the patients of all the doctors in America:

Choose the course that builds on the momentum that the new AMA is achieving.

Choose the road that keeps American medicine on the moral high ground of professionalism which the new AMA is ascending. Choose the way of sacrifice, of service and of joy that the new AMA is offering to all of us.