What’s Inside

House of Delegates and Annual Meeting Recap
Revisit TMA’s 188th Annual Meeting and policy session.
Page 3.

TMA MATE Act Education Course
New education course addresses federal and state requirements for prescribers.
Page 6.

Three Outstanding Physicians Honored
Three TMA members recently received the organization’s Outstanding Physician Award.
Page 5.

Legal Briefs
Review member updates from TMA’s legal department.
Page 7.
Addressing Tennessee’s health is no simple matter. The multi-faceted, multi-dimensional challenges of keeping Tennesseans as healthy, happy, and productive as possible can seem like a Herculean task. As we all know, such efforts necessitate unwavering and tireless commitment. Such efforts are the primary reason why TMA exists and why all Tennessee physicians should be active in its membership.

Many challenges were left unresolved from the 2023 state legislative session. Among them are the continued attempts by physician assistants and nurse practitioners to gain independent practice. Our position remains resolute: the defense and promotion of the physician-led, team-based approach optimizing quality patient care across the state. We will also stand fast and push back where possible against the degradation of patient care, including prior authorization challenges and affordable access to medicine, touted under the banner of “cost savings” by related industry groups. These same groups should be working equally with us for excellence in patient care, not attempting to practice medicine without a license.

New challenges facing physicians include the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Improved technologies can certainly augment patient care when developed with deliberate intent and careful, purposeful innovation. Liability related to these technologies, be it systems or mechanisms, in varied situations has yet to be determined. If physicians are going to utilize such AI in their practices, then clinical guardrails should be in place to ensure patient safety and the proper accountability placed with the developing and manufacturing companies. If AI supplants the physician, then it must carry the costs of its errors.

The success of TMA’s efforts, our efforts as physicians, this year and into the future will rely on the strength and unity of this group. If you attended the 2023 House of Delegates, you are aware that resident physician recruitment and retention in TMA is a high priority for me. In the past 10 years, TMA has grown by over 1,700 members to now just under 10,000 members. Nearly keeping pace with our dues-paying membership growth, resident physician membership will soon be equal to half of that membership. I challenge every physician and TMA component society to develop robust resident physician engagement events to nurture and encourage resident physician voices and participation. These resident physicians are our future physician leadership, and their importance cannot be valued enough. We must integrate them in to our local societies, cultivate their skills and interests, and make the use of their time effectively in the furthering of our common mission.

In addition to TMA succession vitality through committed, young physicians, TMA membership diversity across all specialties and practices areas is significantly important. Several specialties are notably under-represented in TMA membership. TMA works daily, year in and year out, to promote patient and physician interests, not only when extraordinary events occur. As our membership grows, we better represent patient demographics and needs, physician practice areas and specialties across all the locales we serve. Standing united as physicians, our differences and our commonalities combined, we better protect our profession and enhance our patients’ quality of life.

While the 2023 TMA House of Delegates proved to be procedurally challenging, it was an invigorating demonstration by Tennessee physicians of our ongoing determination to protect our profession and uphold our commitment to patients. Highly controversial topics including abortion, firearms, scope of practice, as well as others were addressed. The robust and impassioned discussions remained respectful and focused. A full summary of the submitted resolutions is available at tmmed.org/HOD. Please take a moment to review the HOD outcomes and note the direction TMA is taking on any topic of importance to you. My thanks to the TMA leadership and staff for the success of this year’s HOD.

Andrew Watson, MD | 2023-2024 TMA President
House of Medicine Comes Together for TMA Annual Meeting

TMA recently assembled more than 150 of its physician delegate representatives in Franklin, Tenn., for its 188th Annual Meeting and policy session. The House of Delegates approved a number of resolutions which may impact the practice of medicine and patient health in Tennessee. A full list of policies adopted is available at tnmmed.org/HOD.

During the meeting delegates participated in a special session featuring presentations from two guests, both of whom are TMA members: American Medical Association President-Elect Jesse Ehrenfeld, MD (pictured top right), and Tennessee Department of Health Commissioner Ralph Alvarado, MD (middle right).

During his remarks, Dr. Ehrenfeld emphasized common areas of interest between the national and state medical organizations including finding a fix to prior authorization burdens, reforming Medicare payment to physicians, fighting scope of practice creep, supporting telehealth and reducing physician burnout.

Dr. Alvarado, new to Tennessee following his November appointment by Gov. Bill Lee as state health commissioner, introduced himself to a statewide audience and emphasized the importance of the convergence of public health and organized medicine. As a TMA member, he also introduced a resolution encouraging physicians, particularly psychiatrists and primary care physicians, to promote the use of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline number by offering it as an option to callers.

“This annual forum is where diverse perspectives converge,” said Gene Huffstutter, MD, a Chattanooga rheumatologist and newly elected Chair of the TMA Board of Trustees.

“Physicians are encouraged to engage in the process, and they bring different perspectives from their medical specialties, practice environments, and geographic locations across the state,” he said. “It truly is organized medicine at its best.”

TMA HOUSE OF DELEGATES ACTIONS

Visit tnmmed.org/HOD for a full list of policies adopted by the House of Delegates.
Three Physicians Earn TMA Honors

Michael “Mickey” McAdoo, MD, of Milan, Tenn., Kevin Smith, MD, from Nashville, and Chris Young, MD, of Chattanooga, received TMA’s annual Outstanding Physician awards for 2023, presented during TMA’s 188th Annual Meeting last month in Franklin, Tenn.

The award is presented by the TMA House of Delegates to members of the association for their exemplary service to the profession. It honors members who have made a difference in healthcare within their communities and across the state.

Dr. McAdoo (pictured top right with TMA Speaker of the House of Delegates John McCarley, MD) was nominated by his component medical society, the Consolidated Medical Assembly of West Tennessee.

Throughout his career, Dr. McAdoo has served his colleagues statewide as TMA president and Board chair, president of the Tennessee Academy of Family Physicians and locally as president of the Consolidated Medical Assembly of West Tennessee. Along with multiple board and committee roles, he served as president of the Tennessee Medical Foundation and on the board of State Volunteer Mutual Insurance Company.

During his acceptance speech, Dr. McAdoo urged his colleagues to give back to patients and the profession.

“Be givers,” he said. “It is worth it. Always put your patients foremost.”

Dr. Smith has held numerous leadership roles in organized medicine including a term as TMA President during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. He was also President and Chairman of the Board with the Nashville Academy of Medicine. In 2019, he received the Laureate Award from the Tennessee Chapter of the American College of Physicians, the organization’s highest honor.

“When I became TMA president, we did not know we would be faced with the worst pandemic in 100 years, but we got through it,” said Dr. Smith. “We need to continue to advocate for our profession and our patients in this state. Thank you for allowing me to serve you.”

Dr. Young has distinguished himself as a leader of organized medicine at the national, state and local levels, representing physicians as a whole and within his specialty. In recent years, he served as TMA president, president of the Tennessee Society of Anesthesiologists, and on the boards of directors of the TMA, Chattanooga Hamilton County Medical Society, and American Society of Anesthesiologists.

Last year, he received the Erlanger Health System Foundation’s Distinguished Physician Award for his enduring commitment to improving the health of the community, his unquestionable character and human compassion.

“Our patients need us now more than ever,” said Dr. Young. “Our participation in TMA is one way we can work to support our patients. We are dealing with challenging issues in healthcare today. I have learned that physicians working together can be part of the solution.”

TMA commends these three member physicians for their significant contributions to the medical community. Their commitment to advancing patient care, medical education, and research has significantly impacted healthcare in Tennessee. The Outstanding Physician Award is a testament to their hard work, expertise, and compassionate approach to medicine.
What is an “Appropriate Referral” to the TMF? (Part 2)

This article was submitted by Tennessee Medical Foundation Medical Director and TMA member Michael Baron, MD.

The TMF typically receives more than 100 calls a year asking for our help with a troubled health professional. Part 1 of this series touched on the problematic referrals we receive; in Part 2, I want to discuss what an appropriate referral to the TMF looks like.

Appropriate referrals can come from any source including the HCP themselves, a significant other, employer, practice partner, family member, attorney, concerned colleague or friend, but they always need to involve the person being referred.

Our most appropriate cases involve a physician or healthcare provider who has been directly referred by a Chief Wellness Officer or Chief Medical Officer who understands our process and our mission. They know what information we need and what boxes should be checked off on their end before an official TMF referral is made. Best practice steps include the following.

**Documentation**

We think it’s best practice if a referred provider has a hospital or employer letter stating the reasons for the referral and including an expected timeframe to make contact. If there are concerns of impairment, the healthcare provider should be removed from clinical responsibility immediately. If there are no concerns of patient harm or quality care issues, a slower approach can be utilized.

The documentation should include the name of the physician, the reasons for the referral with some details that exclude patient information, and what the third party hopes to accomplish with the referral. In cases involving patients, they should not be identified but instead referred to as male patient 1, male patient 2, female patient 1, etc. The letter should also include the contact person and contact information for the referring facility.

Release of Information forms are required for us to be able to gather information and provide updates; those should be filled out at the time of the referral and can be found on the TMF website under the “Forms & Resources” tab. After initial contact, for clarity reasons the HCP should always be instructed to call us themselves.

**Understanding**

The TMF is not a regulatory body, we do not investigate. We do not do in-house evaluations or treatment; rather, the TMF does intake and triage assessments, referring to outside entities for formal evaluation or treatment as indicated. We are considered a Quality Improvement Committee (QIC) under state statute; as such we do not release our records or re-release outside records. This ensures participant confidentiality.

**Cases & Contact**

Appropriate referral cases include distressed behavior, burnout, depression, or other mental health disorders, including substance use disorders. For conditions we are unable to monitor, we often refer to alternate resources such as CME courses, therapy, coaching, or other solutions.

Please always plan to have the healthcare provider themselves contact us directly.

If you are still not sure whether or how to make an appropriate referral, you can always call our office for clarification and assistance at 615-467-6411.

*For more information about the TMF Physician’s Health Program, visit e-tmf.org.*

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**IN MEMORIAM**

We offer our prayers and deep gratitude for all passing members. Their positive impact on their patients and profession will last forever.

**Frederick Finke, MD**, age 78, of the Nashville Academy of Medicine on April 26, 2023.

**James Galyon, MD**, age 93, of The Memphis Medical Society on April 28, 2023.

**David Hall, MD**, age 98, of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Medical Society on May 10, 2023.

**Bill Thompson, MD**, age 72, of the Upper Cumberland Medical Society on Aug. 23, 1950.

**Jesse Woodall, Jr., MD**, age 87, of The Memphis Medical Society on May 8, 2023.
New MATE Act Education Course Available

Beginning June 27, prescribers with a DEA license will need to complete a one-time, eight-hour education course on the treatment and management of patients with substance abuse disorders before applying for or renewing a DEA registration. This new training requirement is included in the recently enacted Medication Access and Training Expansion (MATE) Act.

Available now, TMA has a new course available that fulfills this new DEA education requirement.

What makes the course unique is its applicability to all Tennessee prescribers. In addition to meeting the new federal requirement, it will also satisfy the Tennessee licensing boards’ requirement for prescribers to complete a two-hour course on prescribing practices.

Visit [tnmed.org/mateacteducation](http://tnmed.org/mateacteducation) to learn more and take the course.

Be sure to enter code TN50 to save $50 on registration cost.

You will also find additional resources, including an informative FAQ document with answers to questions submitted by TMA members and a list of participating partner organizations including local medical societies and state specialty organizations. Additional questions may be directed to [legal@tnmed.org](mailto:legal@tnmed.org).

TMA Insurance Advocacy Benefits Member Practices

TMA works hard on behalf of members to address insurance issues and assist physicians in navigating the complex world of claims payment. Within the last month, TMA assisted multiple practices with claims payment and prior authorization issues. Below is a summary of this activity:

- Assisted a small urology practice with approximately $220k owed for old claims on which it continually received denials by Palmetto. Gained guidance from Palmetto on how future claims should be properly submitted to earn payment.
- Assisted a general surgery practice in having a previously-denied claim overturned and paid. This practice went through the appropriate channels to obtain prior authorization for the service, but was never informed by the payer as to the reason for the denial.
- Assisted a dermatology practice with denials received from a secondary payer. Broke the communications barrier with the payer to determine the services were indeed covered, and the claims should be submitted to a different department.
- Helped a rheumatology practice have an outstanding claim reprocessed and paid. The patient switched from one health plan to another, and until TMA became involved, this explanation did not compute with the plan.
- Assisted an oncology practice with a two-month delay in receiving a response to a prior authorization request. TMA worked directly with Meridian and correspondence was sent to the practice within two days.
- Helped an urgent care practice with technical questions related to what it could charge fee for service versus bill through the patient’s health plan.

Does your practice need assistance? TMA can help if you are experiencing issues with coding, claim payment, denial, recoupment, or other hassles with an insurer.

Contact TMA Director of Insurance Affairs Tabitha Lara at [tabitha.lara@tnmed.org](mailto:tabitha.lara@tnmed.org).

Insurance Workshop Series Returns

TMA’s Insurance Workshop Series, featuring critical information on compliance and auditing, specialty coding and more through a series of informative webinars, continues this month with its Speakers Series. Visit [tnmed.org/insurance-workshops](http://tnmed.org/insurance-workshops) to learn more.
Abortion Law Guide Update
Due to the shortcomings of Tennessee’s abortion “trigger” law, TMA and a coalition of other health care provider interests lobbied for passage of PC 313 in 2023. The 2023 law, effective on April 28, 2023, amends the “trigger” law statute to add the termination of ectopic and molar pregnancies to the list of actions that are not included in the definition of abortion. It also repeals the affirmative defense and replaces it as an exception to the offense of criminal abortion. To fully understand all of the 2023 changes, please review the Law Guide topics, Abortion and Abortion FAQs at tnmed.org/lawguide.

Laws Effectively Immediately
Several laws enacted by the 2023 General Assembly are now effective and may be of special interest to physicians. These laws are summarized under the news item Member Alert: 2023 Laws Effective Immediately at tnmed.org.

Laws Effective July 1
Several laws enacted by the 2023 General Assembly are effective July 1 and may be of special interest to physicians. These laws are summarized under the news item Member Alert: 2023 Laws Effective July 1 at tnmed.org.

Over-the-Counter Narcan
On March 29, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Narcan (4 mg) naloxone hydrochloride nasal spray for over-the-counter, nonprescription, use. Narcan may now be sold directly to consumers in drug stores, grocery stores, online, etc. It is the first naloxone product approved for use without a prescription.

Medicare Advanced Beneficiary Notice of Noncoverage
A new ABN goes into effect June 30. The TMA Law Guide topic, Advanced Beneficiary Notice of Noncoverage, contains a link to the new form and instructions on how to complete it.

Opioid Resource Center
In 2018, the Tennessee General Assembly passed comprehensive legislation to address the state’s opioid abuse epidemic. TMA’s Opioid Resource Center can assist members in complying with opioid prescription requirements in Tennessee. The resources include a one-page Prescriber Guide, a template Informed Consent to Receive Opioid Therapy, downloadable office posters for patients and employees, and a pocket card for patients that explains the requirements of the law. Members may access these resources at tnmed.org/opioids.

Telemedicine Law Guide Topic
The 2022 General Assembly passed legislation to delete the sunset on telemedicine payment parity and to allow reimbursement for audio-only visits in specific circumstances. Review the Law Guide topic, Telemedicine, at tnmed.org/lawguide for all the details and requirements that must be met to receive the parity and audio-only payments.

Wound Reporting
TMA’s Wound and Injury Reporting Law Guide topic discusses the reporting requirements necessary when a physician sees a patient with specific wounds or injuries, including the possibility of reporting to local law enforcement. Members may access it at tnmed.org/lawguide.

Laws Impacting a Physician Practice
Many state and federal laws may require a practice to take an action or make a report. It is a good idea for a practice to review this topic to ensure it complies with these requirements. Visit tnmed.org/lawguide and locate the topic titled Laws Impacting Physician Practice.

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