

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



A Reflection on 2021: Successes and Sorrows Amid a Pandemic

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As 2021 ends, it is a perfect time to reflect on what this year has meant to me as your ACOFP president. Serving in this role since October 2020 has afforded me the unique opportunity to lead the organization with two different slates of elected Boards of Governors, two groups of appointed committee members and a few staffing changes. I have been able to appoint dynamic task forces responsible for significant proposed changes in our governance structure and the immersion of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in all matters at ACOFP. I have signed countless letters advocating on behalf of our physicians, residents, and medical students and our collective patients. But sadly, I have not had the chance to be with you—my ACOFP family—in person. It has certainly been a time filled with immense pride in our organization, while navigating one of the most isolating and often disheartening times in my career.

March 2020 will forever be the timestamp of COVID-19—disrupting our way of life and making ACOFP pivot quickly to adjust our leadership succession, our delivery of continuing medical education (CME) and our way of conducting business for our specialty college. Little did we know those adjustments would be ongoing throughout 2021, not only out of necessity, but also because of our profession's changing demographic.

Being a part of the committee member appointment process for the past four years has shown me that our changes have inspired more people to volunteer, new leaders to emerge and the objectives of each committee to be attained. Through the work of the CME Advisory Committee and the respective CME Work Groups, we have successfully produced three more virtual CME events in 2021: the 58th Annual Convention & Scientific Seminars, the 2021 Intensive Osteopathic Update and OMED 2021.

Through the leadership of Speaker Elizabeth Palmarozzi, DO, FACOFP, and Vice Speaker Antonios Tsompanidis, DO, FACOFP, as well as the expertise and hard work of our staff, we also conducted an entirely virtual Congress of Delegates. The participation in these virtual events has rivaled the numbers we have ever had at our in-person events and has allowed members who may not traditionally participate to see what ACOFP truly has to offer.

I think this “new participation” has been most evident in our Task Force on DEI. I am proud not only of the work that has already been accomplished by this group but also the action plan that has been formulated for our path forward. Based on the group's recommendations, ACOFP has expanded its membership profile to be more inclusive of sexual identity, ethnicity and military service so that we can better understand various aspects of our membership and help foster welcoming environments for all.

We have devised a unified statement as to the reason for our efforts in the DEI arena, and we are expecting resolutions to be presented during our upcoming Congress that will solidify the policy positions of ACOFP in all matters related to DEI.

I have been educated by the stories and experiences of these task force members, as well as inspired by other members who have shared their own accounts through personal blog posts. There is still so much work to be done, and I am confident that ACOFP President-elect Bruce R. Williams, DO, FACOFP, and the Board of Governors will continue to support these efforts for many years to come.

There has also been a significant amount of time and resources spent on analyzing whether our current governance structure is meeting the needs of our organization. The Task Force on Governance has worked with an external consultant—the Association Management Center—over the past year to discuss whether changes would allow for more diversity in our leadership, more transparency in our processes and more efficiency in implementing new programs for our membership. It is hoped that this work will culminate in meaningful modernization, ultimately advancing ACOFP in its mission and engaging future family physicians who represent the populations we serve.

Our advocacy efforts in 2021 have focused on the continuous protection of patients and the family physicians who care for them. We have been supportive of efforts to continue COVID-19 relief funding and to make vaccines, treatment and personal protection equipment widely available. We have co-signed or authored statements in support of the universal vaccination of healthcare workers, as well as the requirement that children wear masks in school, following the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidance.

We have also worked with other family medicine organizations to address the family physician shortage, advocate for the preservation of the family medicine care model and focus on vulnerable populations by reducing racial disparities. The work of our Federal Legislative & Advocacy Committee—in tandem with our Washington, D.C.-based lobbying group, Alston & Bird—has been invaluable in reviewing legislation that is pertinent to our mission and objectives as osteopathic family physicians.

So, on paper (and on Zoom calls), 2021 has been very successful for ACOFP in so many ways. It has been my honor to serve this organization and to advance the work that has been part of my personal focus since 2019 when serving as president-elect. At that time, a Task Force on Convention Innovation was my main objective, convening to reimagine the delivery of our annual convention through its experience and CME offerings.

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I am very much looking forward to our meeting in March 2022 to see how those ideas come to life as they were supposed to two years ago. I am excited for the camaraderie and fellowship experience, the newly designed lecture schedules and the recognition of award recipients and fellows from the past few years. It should be a celebration of a sense of normalcy and a break from the day-to-day that has not been kind to everyone.

We have all experienced personal and clinical situations that we never imagined we would. We have witnessed hostility and division over public health matters. We have all felt isolation, burnout and, often, a feeling of underappreciation for the jobs we do every day. We have seen the education of our students and residents impacted. We have not been able to exchange an “osteopathic hug” with many of our patients and colleagues.

I have greatly missed the opportunity to represent ACOFP at state meetings and ACOFP student chapter meetings—the very situations that I have always felt most at home in expressing my love and passion for osteopathic family medicine. However, I am grateful for this rare opportunity to have served as your president for more than a year and hope that I have done so in a way that exemplifies all that ACOFP embodies. Wishing you all a healthy end to 2021 and the hope for a better 2022!

Osteopathically,



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