My message to all of you today is one of optimism, acknowledging the challenges that we have faced, and the leadership and resiliency you have all shown. I want to share how proud I am to be your colleague in what I consider to be one of the most important vocations: the delivery of health care.

Some of you may have been called to this vocation from a young age. For others, like myself, it took a bit longer. My path into health care may be unique, a bit unpredictable, but what a great journey it has been.

Path to Health Care
When I was 14, I had the good fortune to have a role, which may not exist any longer, as a house orderly at Dakota Hospital in Fargo, North Dakota. The role was based out of the Emergency Department, and working all shifts including evenings and weekends, the experiences that I had from age 14 to 18 were amazing. It’s hard to believe that as a 14-year-old, I transported patients—both dead and alive, set up patient traction, held children during spinal taps, performed all required CPR during codes, and, lastly, could dean on autopsies for extra money. I doubt these duties are still available today, but what an opportunity.

After high school, I moved to Tucson to attend the University of Arizona; however, as a kid from North Dakota, sun and acquaintances trumped scholastics, so I dropped out and worked at a golf course cutting grass for several years. I soon realized three bucks an hour wasn’t going to work too well. So, I found my way back to Minneapolis and got a full-time job as a house orderly in Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park.

The best thing about working at Methodist Hospital as an orderly was meeting my wife, Meg, back in 1985. She was working as a PT aide waiting to get into PT school. Meg was smarter than me, had college credits and a plan, and she had a car! I, on the other hand, had no college credits, took two buses from south Minneapolis to get to work, and ate ice cream cups and saltine crackers and drank 7-Up from the nurses’ stations refrigerators, as I was broke. I soon realized that I needed to get my act together. So while still working full time, I went.
Folks need to stay connected and need a path to follow that is consistent, well-respected, inclusive, and inviting. We have to provide that path.
COVID: Confronting the Unexpected

I share my journey into health care as an example of the unexpected twists and turns life takes. On a global scale, the pandemic isn’t so much a turn in the road as a drop off a cliff. What a period it has been and what tremendous turmoil all of us have experienced. I think it is fair to say that confronting COVID-19 has been probably one of the most trying and challenging times in health care for so many people, including all of you.

We are not the same leaders we were three years ago. We faced clinical and financial challenges, supply chain and staffing shortages, and a move to virtual not only for patients but for the operations of our organizations. Recently, I was reviewing a 2022 environmental scan report that detailed the unprecedented financial loss to U.S. hospitals/health systems and medical groups. It is projected to be close to a $54 billion net income loss. My sincere appreciation for the advocacy efforts of AMGA and for their leadership as healthcare systems and private medical groups felt the direct financial impact, compromising their ability to potentially remain solvent during the early COVID-19 timeframe.

The pandemic’s toll over the past couple of years has been devastating. Medicine, one of the oldest and most noble occupations, is under so much pressure at a time when the lines between public health and the provision of health care have never been more blurred and intertwined. So often, the rage and noise are deafening, with so much misinformation, mistrust, anger—at a time when folks need to stay connected and need a path to follow that is consistent, well-respected, inclusive, and inviting. We have to provide that path.

AMGA’s Legacy

That is the reason that AMGA has been a sustainable beacon organization for so many of our groups since it was first incorporated May 1, 1950, as the America Association of Medical Clinics (AAMC).

AMGA is a haven that we all need in order to learn from each other; share innovations, successes, and failures; and, most importantly, remain connected. We are a convening organization of 400+ groups and health systems with a patient base of 142 million individuals, serving well over one-third of the country. Think about that for a moment, That is truly significant. This organization is here to help make a difference, and you are part of it.

Legacy and history are often what hold people together, and innovation is how we grow.

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