What if our medical associations keep shrinking until they are gone?

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Outline

1. The drivers of declining memberships in professional associations

2. What is the impact of diminished professional associations?

3. What can/should be done to re-invigorate professional associations?
Disclosure and Disclaimer

Matthew Wynia, MD, MPH, FACP

Developed the Climate Assessment Tools program for the AMA, a non-profit endeavor to produce tools to measure the ethical quality climate in health care organizations.

Views and opinions expressed are mine alone and should not be construed as statements of the American Medical Association.
Drivers of declining professional association membership
Why is membership falling?

• Broad social drivers
  – Cynicism about group membership
• Disagreement with organizational priorities
• Frustration by lack of control
  – Easy to find examples of failures
• Financial incentive to quit in righteous indignation
• Little understanding of how they work
Pogo:

We have met the enemy and he is us

Walt Kelly
Implications of declining membership
Professionalism defined

- Profess: (v) To speak out in public, openly declare
- Profession: (n) A group speaking out, together, about their shared standards and values
- Professional: (n) An individual member of the group; (adj) acting in conformance with the shared standards and values of the group
- Professionalism: (n) a belief system (an “-ism”), holding that professional groups are uniquely well-suited to organize and deliver certain social goods.
  - Establish our own standards for quality
  - Ensure and support adherence to them…
Recent Theories

• Structuralist-functionalist school (pre-1960)
  😊 Useful social function for each professional characteristic
  😊 Profession as “interstitial go-between”
  😊 Psychologically distinguished people become professionals

• Critical “power” theorists (1960-present)
  🌟 Professional perogratives are hard-won privileges
  🌟 Won by aggressive pursuit of a shared interest in high status and income, and even ...
  🌟 Willingness to make promises without intending to keep them
3 “Ideal Types” for Delivery of Important Social Goods

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Mixed Models: Quality Assurance

- Professional
  - Peer-review
  - Education, ethics and socialization

- Economic/Market
  - Consumer info → voice/exit
  - Use of accreditation

- Political/State
  - licensure
  - malpractice
A Balancing Act

State  Profession  Market

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ABMS Definition

Medical professionalism is a belief system about how best to organize and deliver health care, which calls on group members to jointly declare ("profess") what the public and individual patients can expect regarding shared competency standards and ethical values and to implement trustworthy means to ensure that all medical professionals live up to these promises.
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What does “professional autonomy” mean?

• **NOT** the right of individual physicians to practice as they please; **RATHER**

• The right of the profession, as a group, to establish *and enforce* practice standards

• Core question: How much personal liberty does one relinquish on becoming a professional?
  – Personal ≠ Institutional ≠ Legal ≠ professional duties
Personal vs Professional

- Morality
  - What I believe to be right
  - What we agree is professionally right

- Values
  - What I believe to be important aims
  - What we agree on as professional aims
Legal or Institutional Duties

- Laws are **not** a minimum ethical standard.

If legal or institutional rules are confused with professional obligations (as they often are), physicians will be unable to appreciate the tensions that can arise between the two. But if the profession is alive to the possibility that externally imposed rules can demand unprofessional conduct, the organized profession can work to change the rules so that conscientious practitioners won't have to face tragic choices between acting unprofessionally and violating laws or institutional policies.

Kipnis and Gerhart, 1995
In Sum, Professional Associations are Necessary for Professionalism

Retaining Our Status as a Profession Requires Reinvigorating Our Professional Associations
What Professions Need to Do

- **Technical Problems**
  - Clear problem
  - Expert provides solution
  - Solutions easy to accept

- **Adaptive Challenges**
  - Problem hard to acknowledge
  - Solutions are within
  - Solutions require difficult change
Some problems are easy

Technical Problems

- Problem clearly visible
- Independent of other problems
- Non controversial goals
- Off the shelf solution works
- A technician can fix it
- Fix is often permanent

Slides adapted from Catherine Lucey, MD
Some problems are hard

- Insidious problems
- Lack of agreement on the nature of the problem
- Solutions require new learning
- Those with the problem are the problem – and the solution – a leader can’t ‘fix it’

Adaptive Challenges
The single biggest failure of leadership is to treat adaptive challenges like technical problems.

*Much of modern health care is about addressing adaptive challenge*
The Role of Associations…

Professionals come together to do what we cannot do alone:
- Articulate shared standards and values
- Support each other
- Help us manage adaptive challenges
ABMS Definition

- Medical professionalism requires an active and iterative process involving:
  - Defining
  - Debating
  - Declaring
  - Distributing
  - Enforcing and Supporting
- The set of discrete, shared standards and values that medical professionals agree must govern our work.  

Adapted from the ABMS definition of Medical Professionalism
AMA’s Approach: The AMA Equation
A Focused Agenda

• Patients
  – Improving Health Outcomes

• Medical Students
  – Accelerating change in medical education

• Physicians
  – Driving payment and practice models that support physician professional fulfillment
Innovation Pathway

1. Research and evaluate
2. Devise intervention strategies
3. Implement and test
4. Adjust and reassess
5. Scale for impact
Current Positioning on the Arc

**IHO**
- Target: ~315M Citizens
- Current Stage: Devise intervention

**Medical Education**
- Target: ~140 Medical Schools
- Current Stage: Implement and test

**Physician Satisfaction**
- Target: ~900K Physicians
- Current Stage: Research and evaluate
Sir William Osler was asked by a medical student what he would get out of attending a medical society meeting. He replied...

Do you think I go for what I can get out of it, or what I can put into it?
The punishment of wise men who refuse to participate in the affairs of government is to live under the rule of unwise men.

Plato
Thank You

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What questions do you have?