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## Building the Next Generation of Physician Leaders

By Tiffani Sherman

After four years of medical school and at least three years of residency, the last thing many physicians want to do is go back for more schooling. But that's exactly what the students who are part of the Texas Medical Association's Leadership College are doing.

"It was about not only being a leader in medicine, but I also wanted to represent patients," said Ray Callas, MD, an anesthesiologist from Beaumont, TX, and a 2011 graduate of the college. "What I loved about it is I could listen to other physicians and hear their stories and that made me a better physician. Everyone is put on the same playing field and has a lot to bring to the table"

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The college is for physicians under the age of 40 who are in their first eight years of practice. It was specifically designed to encourage young doctors to become more active in the Texas Medical Association (TMA) and to help them explore

## their leadership potential.

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Gregory Johnson, MD, is part of group that created the college in 2009. He's also a 2010 graduate. At the time, Johnson was the chair of the young physicians' section of the TMA. He noticed the younger members were typically not active in policy making or other areas of the association. He attributed this primarily to "association overload": Many physicians devote most of their energy to their specialty medical organizations, which leaves them with less time for the TMA.

The organization has many active medical students who become less involved after they became residents, often because of time. "My biggest concern was, where are the people of my generation and why aren't they here? It's better for everybody if there are more fantastic people with fantastic minds," Johnson said.

Since the TMA helps shape medical policy in one of the nation's largest states, Johnson said a lack of younger members with different and more modern perspectives could be detrimental to both the TMA and patient care as a whole.



TMA's leaders thought that adding a tangible benefit would help attract more members. So they decided to create the Leadership College and make it available exclusively to members. Teaching young physicians leadership skills, which are not often taught in medical school, would be a way for the TMA to give back to its dues-paying members. Class size is limited to about 20 people, who represent a cross-section of medical specialty and geography.

"Physicians are leaders whether they think about it or not," Johnson said. They're expected to make decisions and lead patient care. People outside of medicine often look up to physicians, he added. The Leadership College teaches students skills that make them better leaders both in a clinical setting and within their community.

"It is focused on medical topics, but it is about leadership and ways and opportunities to lead," Johnson said. Every student sits on a TMA committee or council and has an older and more experienced TMA member serving as a mentor. The students also receive media and social media training to learn how to present themselves and articulate ideas to a non-medical audience.

"Patients look to me to give them comfort and give them care," Callas said. "Whenever I think of a leader, I don't think of a boss. I think of someone who is trying to promote the safety and security of patients."

The education happens in three phases over the course of about a year. Medical specialty societies or county medical societies sponsor students. Some of the training is in person, other parts online. They kick off the training with a boot camp, which includes a focus exam to determine if students are committed to learning and bringing back the knowledge to their home areas. Participants continue with assignments during the next few months and get together at the organization's winter conference. They present their final project at TMA's TexMed, a gathering in late spring.

"It's very hard to complete. You have a lot of time that's committed," Callas said. "It's not for everyone. You have to be willing to take time out of your schedule and be willing to be a leader in medicine throughout the state of Texas and the nation."

The concept appears to be working. Johnson said the active membership in the young physicians' section of the TMA has grown from about five to about 40 or 50. "It has changed the tone of the organization," he said. Younger physicians now come to meetings and discuss initiatives and participate on committees. "It's about getting people to the table and understanding what the TMA does."

Graduates have gone on to be leaders at their hospitals or practices. Callas says he plans to take what he learned and run for public office so he can help shape the future of medical care.

"My favorite part of the program was sitting and learning from other physician's standpoints. We have to be dynamic, we have to be more than just bosses," he said. "The Leadership College is not about us as physicians. It's about improving patient care."

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