

# PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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Last month, I wrote about the historic health care bill and its likely outcome as it concerns access to justice for families affected by preventable medical errors. How things can change overnight! As this edition goes to print, the future of the bill is anybody's guess, and we remain vigilant in protecting the American people from any ill-conceived- effort to bargain away the rights of injured patients and their families.

This development is Exhibit A in the multitude of reasons for being a member of AAJ. The Seventh Amendment right to seek redress in the courts for wrongful conduct that kills or maims will forever be under attack by powerful corporate interests. It is political pabulum for these interests to talk about tort "reform" as the answer to every conceivable challenge facing our country. We must continue to educate the public and members of Congress on these important issues.

In matters of public policy, AAJ represents the interests of every lawyer who represents plaintiffs in all 50 states and in the U.S. territories. Yet many plaintiff lawyers are not members of AAJ and rely on others to carry their water. If all state trial lawyer association members were AAJ members, our numbers would be stronger and our voice more resonant. This challenge must be addressed head-on.

Last summer, in my first column on this page, I challenged you to get involved in the critical work of building membership in AAJ. Since then, many of you have risen to that challenge. Trial lawyers around the country have recruited colleagues to join us. Members have hosted and participated in phonathons from coast to coast. State and local trial lawyer associations are cohosting events that jointly support their own organizations and AAJ.

And members are using the Member Connector online to reach out to colleagues who

have been AAJ members in the past, bringing them back into the fold. In addition to recommitting to fight for our clients' rights, these returning members are rediscovering the value of AAJ membership. Among the advantages of membership is the ability to network with colleagues and share information via the AAJ Exchange and sections and litigation groups.

## **Working together**

AAJ's 18 sections and more than 100 litigation groups are critical tools for members representing injured people. The sections bring together members who work in broad practice areas; litigation group members share expertise on representing clients in specific types of cases. And the Exchange gives AAJ members access to more than 150,000 documents to help them prepare cases.

Last year, AAJ certified 17 new litigation groups, including those on Chinese drywall, Reglan, wage-and-hour cases, and class action litigation. Members network over secure, plaintiff-only list servers. The groups present education programs at AAJ's annual and winter conventions and at specialized programs throughout the year.

The sections are equally active and resourceful. All 18 sections have presented CLE programs over the last five years. Section members have access to practice-specific list servers and online document libraries, and they receive quarterly newsletters that keep them informed about trends in their practice area.

I can attest personally to successful prosecution of cases because of contacts and information from the list servers, the Exchange, and other AAJ networking. In my travels to state association meetings, I often hear attorneys say that they don't need to belong to AAJ because they have a local practice. I explain why everything AAJ does in public policy affects their local practice, and—as one who has experienced more than one suc-

cess because of information garnered from the list servers or AAJ Exchange—that I cannot imagine representing a plaintiff without access to the thousands of members who might have had cases against the same defendant or involving the same product.

AAJ's sections and litigation groups function for the individual and collective good: By participating in these groups, members gain access to resources they need to succeed in their practices, and they become actively engaged in AAJ and contribute to achieving our common goals.

Get involved now by joining a section or litigation group and participating in membership recruitment. For more information, contact Anne Doohan, director of sections and litigation groups and the Exchange, at (202) 965-3500, ext. 8522, or [anne.doohan@justice.org](mailto:anne.doohan@justice.org). To participate in member recruitment activities, contact our membership director, Tamara Kukla, at (202) 965-3500, ext. 8402, or [tamara.kukla@justice.org](mailto:tamara.kukla@justice.org).

As I wrote last summer, membership matters—now more than ever.