

NATIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION: *The Pursuit of Equitable Health Care*

Nicole C.P. Thompson, M.D., Chair
Anesthesiology Section, National Medical Association

Over the last 123 years, the National Medical Association (NMA) has been a beacon for African-American physicians. This organization was founded in 1895 by Daniel Hale Williams, M.D., Daniel L. Martin, M.D., David H.C. Scott, M.D., H.R. Butler, M.D., Miles V. Lynk, M.D., and Robert F. Boyd, M.D. It has been instrumental in working toward health care equity since being established. Its mission is “to advance the art and science of medicine for people of African descent through education, advocacy, and health policy to promote health and wellness, eliminate health disparities, and sustain physician viability.” The NMA was founded because the American Medical Association would not allow African-American physicians to become members. This gave no voice to the concerns of physicians of color and, in turn, gave no voice to their patients. The AMA issued an official apology to NMA in July 2008 for this historical level of discrimination, and the NMA accepted. Since its inception, the NMA has been diligently working to improve health care outcomes for underserved populations and provide our physicians a place where they can be heard and a place to belong.

In the early years, there were many forces working against meeting the needs of the underserved. As social and political climates changed, the NMA partnered with organizations that have the common goal of eliminating health disparities. Unfortunately, today there are still many areas all over our country where access to care is still an issue. At times when access is available, a lack of cultural competency along with the lack of a diverse medical staff leads to disparate care.



Nicole C.P. Thompson, M.D., is
Assistant Professor of Anesthesiology,
University of Illinois Hospital and
Health Sciences System, Chicago.

The NMA continues to foster a more diverse and culturally competent workforce through mentorship and recruitment of students into the medical field.

This year marks the 116th Annual NMA Convention and Scientific Assembly, which will be held in Orlando, Florida, from August 11-15, 2018. The theme of this year's meeting is “The Urgency of Now: Creating a Culture of Health Equity.” Each year, this meeting attracts participants from all areas of health care and from all over the globe. We have 26 scientific programs that span medical specialties from aerospace medicine to women's health. Each section plans programs that are uniquely beneficial to its specialty, including joint sessions with cross-collaboration between specialties. In addition to the robust scientific sections, the NMA also hosts programs for children and the community at every annual meeting.

The Anesthesiology Section has more than 100 actively engaged members. Many of the individuals in the NMA Anesthesiology Section are leaders in health care and anesthesiology. Many serve in ASA as leaders of state anesthesiology societies and serve on numerous ASA committees. The first anesthesiologist U.S. Surgeon General has been an active participant in the NMA Anesthesiology Section, where we recognized his talent as a national leader on health care policy.

This year, the Anesthesiology Section looks forward to the Resident Scientific Presentation and Awards Forum where residents are chosen to present original research and medically challenging cases. In addition, the Pain Symposium will focus on opioid stewardship and alternative pain management techniques. Furthermore, other programming highlights include obstacles and pitfalls while advancing as a physician leader, sickle cell crisis management, perioperative management of mass casualties and a difficult airway symposium. Each year, we enjoy excellent lectures and discussions on topics that affect our practice and patients. More information can be found by following the NMA Anesthesiology Section on Facebook, and meeting registration can be found on the NMA website at nmanet.org. We invite everyone who is interested in promoting health equity to join us in Orlando for what will be an outstanding NMA anesthesiology program.