

## *Virtual Mentor*

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### **VIEWPOINT**

#### **Politics, Policy, and Medicine**

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- As a result of the recent federal elections, 13 women including First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton will be serving as Senators in the United States Congress, the highwater mark for women in Senate history. Both Senators in the states of California, Washington, and Maine will be women. In the House of Representatives, 56 of the 425 members will be women.
- The AMA's House of Delegates is the legislative and primary policy-making body of the Association, and thus, it is often referred to as the Congress of the AMA. The House comprises 535 delegates selected by state medical societies, medical specialty organizations, special sections, military and other government service entities, and other organizations granted seats by the House. According to a recent AMA report, the House of Delegates is 88 percent male whereas the overall physician and medical student population is 75 percent male.
- The House of Delegates convenes twice a year in June and December to deliberate and vote to establish official AMA policy. In the recently concluded December 2000 meeting, several actions were taken, including support for making emergency contraception pills more readily available. In addition, the House of Delegates voted to revise the [Principles of Medical Ethics](#) in response to changes in medicine and the health care system. The revisions included two new principles stating that "a physician shall, while caring for a patient, regard responsibility to the patient as paramount" and "a physician shall support access to medical care for all people." According to the AMA's Constitution and Bylaws, the House of Delegates can vote on approving these revisions to the Principles in their next meeting, which will be in June 2001 in Chicago.
- AMA's Code of Medical Ethics Opinion E-9.012 states that "physicians enjoy the rights and privileges of free political speech shared by all Americans. It is laudable for physicians to run for political office, to lobby for political positions, parties or candidates, and in every other way to exercise the full scope of their political rights as citizens." It is natural that in fulfilling these political responsibilities, physicians will express their views to patients or their families. However, communications by telephone or other modalities with patients and their families about political matters must be conducted with the utmost sensitivity to patients' vulnerability and desire for privacy. Conversations about political matters are not appropriate

at times when patients or families are emotionally pressured by significant medical circumstances.

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