Orleans and Jefferson Parish Societies Collaborate to Serve Physicians and Medical Students in the Greater New Orleans Area

WHEN IT COMES TO PROVIDING HEALTHCARE, no region in the country has dealt with more unique environmental, sociological, and cultural challenges than those experienced by the Greater New Orleans area. Poverty, crime, drug addiction, teen pregnancy, low levels of education, and natural disaster have plagued it for decades. Hurricane Katrina caused a major brain drain in the medical community, and yet there are over two thousand physicians replenishing the area. Poor health indicators, including a high smoking rate, morbid obesity, and alcoholism, contribute to the high incidence of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and mental health issues.

ORLEANS PARISH MEDICAL SOCIETY (OPMS) and Jefferson Parish Medical Society (JPMS) have long played important roles in representing and supporting the unique needs of physicians and medical students living and working in Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and the River Parishes. Now, more than ever before, the two societies are working in tandem to meet the needs of its members, future members, and the patients they serve. In 2017, these organizations took important steps to solidify their collaborative efforts to best serve physicians, medical students, patients, and communities in the three-parish area located on both sides of the 17th Street Canal (a primary boundary that separates Orleans and Jefferson parishes). “Established over one hundred forty years ago, Orleans Parish Medical Society has always played an important role in supporting the unique needs of physicians and their patients in the Greater New Orleans area. We are proud of our history, and excited for the future as we work closely with Jefferson Parish Medical Society to benefit the citizens of our region, and the people who deliver the healthcare to them,” said Dr. George Ellis, Jr., 2018-2019 President, OPMS.

Both organizations were established to:

• Assist in the advancement of medical science
• Improve the delivery of medical care in Orleans, Jefferson, and surrounding parishes
• Assist governmental agencies in the development of policy affecting the citizens of our region
• Provide timely health education and information to the people and physicians living and practicing medicine in these areas
• Provide medical services to the people in those areas in times of disaster
• Further medical education

Another important function of OPMS, JPMS, and the combination of the two, is to serve as liaisons to other professional medical associations, such as the American Medical Association (AMA) and Louisiana State Medical Society (LSMS), in providing government and industry leaders with impartial information relevant to physician/patient issues. OPMS and JPMS also provide physicians, residents, and medical students who qualify for membership, with ample opportunity to network and socialize with peers.

In 2017, the organizations co-hosted a networking event at historic Rock & Bowl, which included bowling, food, beverages, dancing, and music by The Arrhythmias—a rock and roll band consisting of members of JPMS, and other medical professionals from the Greater New Orleans area. In 2017, the organizations provided CME/CE opportunities, as well as other information and seminars, on topics related to practice management, policy, and health care trends. Continuing medical education activities included a MACRA educational...
event in March, presented by LSMS at Drago’s Restaurant in Metairie, and a Simply Speaking HIV program at Ralph’s On The Park in April. In August 2017, OPMS and JPMS also co-hosted a Healthcare Legislative Wrap-Up at The Heritage Grill in Metairie. Members gathered to hear LSMS outline the major successes during the 2017 Legislative Session. OPMS and JPMS are currently planning educational, informational, and social events throughout 2018, including a meet and greet event in April, with the AMA’s new president-elect, Dr. Barbara McAneny. The program will include a social and networking reception, followed by a presentation by Dr. McAneny, and representatives from both organizations on the topic, “How to survive and prosper in a time of MIPS, MACRA and the burden of regulatory changes: Predictions for healthcare in the next 3-5 years”.

In the medical practice environment, OPMS and JPMS have advocated for significant legislative and regulatory reform to help physicians address changes, which have come with third party insurance, and government mandates, that make it more difficult for patients to receive quality healthcare.

In January 2017, the Louisiana State Medical Society (LSMS) House of Delegates voted to amend its LSMS charter and bylaws, as they relate to the requirement for joint membership in state and individual parish medical societies. As a result, membership in state and parish organizations is encouraged, but no longer required. Physicians, medical residents, and medical students in Jefferson, Orleans, and St. Bernard parishes, may now choose to join their parish societies, or LSMS, or both. Any physician, resident, or medical student who lives and/or practices in Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, or the River Parishes, qualifies for membership in OPMS or JPMS. Annual dues
in both organizations remain only $250 for active members, and free for medical students and residents. OPMS and JPMS now have simple online enrollment and renewal platforms that can be found on their respective websites, along with more specific news and information about the medical societies, including history, officers, upcoming events, bylaws, and contact information. Both organizations are also on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter social media platforms.

Membership in OPMS and JPMS provide physicians and medical students with:

• A reliable source of information on issues that affect physician practices
• An unbiased forum for professional unity, through opportunities to network with colleagues in every medical specialty and practice setting, at OPMS/JPMS sponsored CME and social events
• An educational resource for physicians and their practice managers on medical practice issues

• A referral resource for patients seeking assistance in selecting a physician in the Greater New Orleans area

The vision for their collaborative efforts going forward is to provide a strong, unified voice for patient advocacy, and professional development for physicians throughout Orleans, Jefferson, and surrounding parishes, while advocating for physicians’ rights, and quality care for patients as related to Medicare, Medicaid, or private insurers.

About Orleans Parish Medical Society:

Founded in 1878, the mission of Orleans Parish Medical Society remains to serve as the voice of, and advocate for the medical profession in the Greater New Orleans area, for the benefit of patients and the community, and to be the primary proponent of the ethical practice of medicine.

OPMS has served as a thought leader and resource in improving population health, and health outcomes in the Orleans and St. Bernard parish areas. OPMS’s heritage is rich, and woven into the fabric of New Orleans. Its impact has been felt in the public health arena as a leader in polio eradication, the smoking cessation movement, and EMS protocol development and oversight.

In 2017, OPMS leadership approved a strategic plan to be used for the future direction of the organization, that consists of five primary goals:

1. Re-establish organizational infrastructure
2. Create value, grow membership, and enhance membership engagement
3. Establish and be recognized as experts and the voice of medicine in New Orleans, to influence and improve community health
4. Position OPMS as a premier source of education for physicians on health care trends and policy, lifestyle, and practice management opportunities
5. Position OPMS to be the convener of organizations in the community, to develop consensus and strategy to address public health challenges and improve patient outcomes

George Ellis, Jr., MD, serves as 2018-2019 President of Orleans Parish Medical Society. Dr. Ellis is an ophthalmologist who specializes in pediatric eye diseases and adult strabismus. After completing a residency in ophthalmology at the Duke University Eye Center, he received specialized training in his chosen field with Drs. Zane Pollard, Marshall Parks, David Guyton, and Clinton McCord. In 1995, after twelve years as full time faculty at the LSU Eye Center and Tulane University Department of Ophthalmology, he assumed the Directorship of Ophthalmology at Children’s Hospital of New Orleans, and maintains appointments at both medical schools. He served as president-elect from 2016 through 2017. Dr. Ellis replaced Royce Dean Yount, MD, a cardiologist, who served as president from 2016 through 2017.

Led by Juan Gershaniak, MD, 2018-1019 president-elect, OPMS recently drafted and submitted a resolution to the Louisiana State Medical Society House of Delegates to raise the tobacco purchase age in Louisiana to 21. The resolution was approved and now awaits Louisiana legislative sponsorship.

About Jefferson Parish Medical Society:

In 1959, before there were any hospitals in the parish, thirty-five Jefferson Parish physicians realized the patients and physicians of Jefferson Parish needed to have their own voice in Louisiana’s medical affairs. This group of physicians petitioned the Louisiana State Medical Society to charter the Jefferson Parish Medical Society (JPMS). The physicians who chartered JPMS were leaders who influenced the extraordinary growth of health care delivery in Jefferson Parish, now recognized as the premiere provider of medical care in our area.

Jefferson Parish Medical Society exists to represent physicians and medical students. JPMS helps patients find doctors in Gretna, Harvey, Kenner, Marrero, and Metairie. JPMS holds educational meetings and publishes newsletters and an online physician directory.

John H. Wales, M.D., serves as of President of Jefferson Parish Medical Society. Since joining JPMS in 1994, Dr. Wales has been an active and involved leader in both JPMS, where he served on the JPMS Board since 2012, and the Louisiana State Medical Society, where he has served as a Delegate in the House of Delegates. He attended Albany Medical College, and completed his Emergency Medicine Residency in Denver, followed by active duty in the Air Force Medical Corps at Andrews AFB.

He has been the Medical Director of the Emergency Department at East Jefferson General Hospital since 1994, and recently retired in January. Dr. Wales succeeds Pablo Labadie, MD who served as President in 2017.

Some of the issues that JPMS has tackled include endorsing water fluoridation, and the K.O. polio immunization drive that resulted in ninety percent of children and adults being vaccinated in the early 1960s. The excess funds from that drive were used to underwrite D-T immunizations. After Hurricane Katrina, JPMS helped members rebuild their practices so Jefferson Parish residents could have access to medical care. JPMS is a not-for-profit organization with a non-profit charitable subsidiary called the Jefferson Physician’s Foundation (JPF). Both organizations raised funds and contributed volunteer hours to Jefferson Parish Drug Free School programs, educational displays for the Louisiana Science and Nature Center, Second Harvest Food Bank, and Teen Life Counts (a suicide prevention and awareness program).

For additional information, or to enroll in Orleans Parish Medical Society or Jefferson Parish Medical Society, visit their respective websites at OPMS.org or JPMS.org. Both organizations can be found on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.