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AAFP Membership Hits All-time High

AAFP membership surged to a record high in 2010, going above the 97,000-member mark for the first time ever. As of December 31, 2010 (the official count date), the AAFP had 97,600 members, nearly 3,000 more than at the end of 2009.

All major membership categories had increases compared with 2009 levels. The rise in student membership was particularly striking, with the Academy adding more than 2,000 student members to its rolls. That's great news for the future of our specialty! Resident membership also increased. So did the percentage of residency graduates who converted to active membership—the first such increase in 10 years.

There also was an uptick in the percentage of active members who renewed their membership, with 94.4% renewing. All together, the number of active members jumped by nearly 600, including some FPs who had never been members before.

To be honest, I wasn't sure what the AAFP's membership numbers would be at the end of 2010. We had changed our membership cycle. I had heard from members who strongly disagreed with some of our advocacy positions and the Consumer Alliance Program. I had hoped that members recognized a bolder approach to advocacy on their behalf, but I was unsure. It had crossed my mind that the numbers might be flat or even drop, given these issues and the continuing political turmoil surrounding health care reform. Needless to say, I was excited and energized when the actual membership numbers were much better than I expected.

Bolder Than Ever

What sparked this membership increase? I hope and believe that a primary reason is the Academy's bolder-than-ever approach on issues important to family physicians. A few years ago, feedback from members showed that, although they believed in the AAFP, they found it to be "plain vanilla" at a time when they needed stronger advocacy to solve the problems they faced. In response, AAFP leaders vowed that the Academy would become the specialty's "bold champion," representing members with more assertive actions and forceful language than ever before—and we have tried to do just that.

As we've become bolder, we've gotten more attention and had more influence with policymakers and other health care stakeholders. And, we've had more success in convincing them of the foundational role family medicine and primary care should play in a reformed health care system.

Our rise in student membership shows that the message also is getting through to medical students. More of them see family medicine as a desirable career option. And young physicians increasingly see the AAFP in a positive light, as shown by the first increase in 10 years in residency grads continuing with us as active members.

The AAFP's robust membership numbers should telegraph a powerful message to legislators and others, who should realize we're increasing in strength at a time when some medical associations may be struggling.

Heartfelt Thanks

I want to thank the family physicians who renewed their membership in 2010. Thank you for your loyalty and solidarity in supporting the specialty we all love. I hope you know that we are working hard to lead family medicine and primary care into a bright future, even if you don't agree with every position we take along the way.

In addition, I want to welcome the new members to the Academy, and thank them for supporting family medicine. I know you'll find value in the many benefits of your AAFP membership.

I'd also like to thank our constituent chapters' incredible leaders and staff for their strong collaboration with the AAFP's Commission on Membership and Member Services and Membership Division this past year. They all did excellent work in conveying the value of membership to current and potential members.

As we move into this new year, I promise that AAFP leaders won't waver from our commitment to bold advocacy. We'll keep pushing for changes to advance our specialty and to make it easier for you to practice every day as you help patients lead healthier lives. Physician payment and liability reform top the list of our issues to strongly promote, as does shaping improvements in the regulations to implement health reform.

Powerful together, we will make a significant difference in the coming months. Thank you again for your loyalty and support.

Roland Goertz, MD, MBA
AAFP President