

# Family Medicine Updates



Ann Fam Med 2024;22:70. <https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.3085>

## NEW AAFP PRESIDENT CALLS ON FAMILY PHYSICIANS TO BE “SERVANT LEADERS”

“Life is hard,” Steven Furr, MD, FAAFP, of Jackson, Alabama, acknowledged during remarks kicking off his AAFP presidency at the 2023 Family Medicine Experience in Chicago on October 27, 2023.

Then he offered another axiom: “Family physicians do ‘hard’ better than anybody else.”

In a speech that ranged from poking gentle fun at himself to recalling a heartbreaking final visit with a patient, Furr laid out thinking that equips AAFP members to push through difficulty—and called on his audience take 3 important steps: Take care of others, take care of yourself, and take care of business.

“You’ve been called a superhero, and you are,” he said. “But even superheroes have their limits. You can only do the best job of taking care of others if you are in your best condition—spiritually, mentally, and physically.”

### Taking Care, Taking the Lead

“First,” he said, “we take care of others. No one does it like us. No one does it better than us.”

“But that alone is not enough,” he added. “We have to step into 2 areas which we might not feel quite as comfortable.”

Taking care of self and taking care of business are critical to being able to take care of patients.

“If you focus exclusively on taking care of others without taking care of yourself, eventually you will be in no condition, physically or mentally or spiritually, to take care of others.”

Furr recalled a time when he was overweight, uncomfortable, and fatigued. Initially, he blamed his workload.

“Then I started taking care of myself. I got up earlier, and I devoted the early morning hours to me. I exercised on the treadmill daily. I could read my devotionals and review emails while exercising on the elliptical. Now, by the time most people get up in the morning, I’ve already had a successful day.”

But ensuring that this self-care translates to effective clinical practice, Furr cautioned, requires that family physicians commit to that 3rd step: taking care of business.

“Even if you do an excellent job of taking care of others and taking care of yourself, you can have success in those areas but be a failure in your business and your practice,” he said. “We do the best job of taking care of others and taking care of ourselves when we efficiently and wisely hone our practice skills and situations.”

### The Business of Leadership

Furr added that this sharpening should include seeking out leadership opportunities. He pointed to the concept of servant leadership, which suggests that organizations strive to be servants who lead rather than leaders who happen to serve. This, he said, “sounds like the definition of a family physician.”

Furr called on AAFP members to be leaders of health care.

To do that, he added, family physicians must find spaces that need their guidance.

“As a family physician, you are on the main stage of life. You stand at the crossroads of health and disease, life and death. We cannot afford to waste this moment to lead. There are boardrooms everywhere where your wisdom and expertise are critical,” he said. “Whether it’s at your state academy, state medical association, boards of health or medical examiner boards, or city commissions, our councils of education, we need you there in those seats, where the decisions are being made.”

### ‘Our Great Mission’

“In the busyness of medicine, it’s easy to forget why we began this journey: We had a sincere desire to make a difference in the lives of others,” Furr said. “That is still what gives our days their meaning and our lives their purpose. We cannot ever lose that—because if we do, we lose ourselves.”

But Furr—who had earlier told lawmakers, in testimony before a congressional subcommittee hearing on Medicare physician payment and related topics, that physician burnout and attrition threaten the country’s well-being—wondered aloud how to “carry out our great mission” in a time of increasing challenge.

“Despite all the difficulties and hardships we face—whether it is prior authorization, reimbursement, government intrusion in the exam room, EHR complexities, or quality measure hassles—we can never forget that not only do we have the greatest job in all the world, but we have the deep and holy honor to serve our fellow human beings as they move through the joys and difficulties of life.”

*News Staff  
AAFP News*