

American Medical Women's Association, Inc. Inaugural Address of Vivian K. Harlin, M.D. November 10, 1980

one another. And, inevitably, I discovered that my voice, added to a chorus of women speaking out against previously accepted practices, could bring about new opportunities for women in medicine.

I would not now be on the podium as your incoming president if I were not convinced that there needs to be an American Medical Women's Association. I am sure that the coordinated effort of the entire membership can and will result in beneficial changes for women physicians, women medical students and prospective students, and more generally, for women. If I did not believe it, I would not have run for office. It is my very strong feeling that women physicians have had some special experiences that they can share with others through the annual meeting, the Journal, the newsletters, and through other sponsored activities. This same kind of sharing is not possible through membership in other societies or organizations. No other medical groups have the same sisterhood enjoyed by the membership of AMWA, for we have not only our medical careers, but we have a special view out into the world of women. From this vantage point we are able to see things which others have failed to open their eyes to, and we have raised our voices together to demand constructive change and equity.

Changes have come and will continue to take place for women in the medical field and for the American Medical Women's Association. It is necessary. Growth does not occur without it. Change is never, however, without risk. At this meeting and in the past, many of you have spoken of changes that you would like to see in AMWA. It is clear that not every member will say yes to every change that is projected. Innovation is not always popular. But we have to recognize that this is not the same world that it was in 1915, when the AMWA was chartered, nor in 1938, when some of the people present today paid dues for the first time. This is not the same nation it was in 1966, when I visited Washington, D.C., to attend my first national conference. This organization must keep pace with the times or it will surely fail to grow and flourish.

AMWA pioneers put a lot of time and energy into building it into a stable and growing organization, serving the needs of its membership. The spirit of those women is still very much with us today. We owe so much to them. It is clear, however, that the wants and expectations

I am profoundly grateful for the many good things that have come my way during my lifetime. Your selection of me as president of this distinguished organization is certainly one of the best. It is with sincere humility and appreciation that I accept this high office, knowing that leadership of the American Medical Women's Association is not simply the respected title of president conferred on me by my friends and colleagues, but an obligation and a trust. I can assure you that I take the responsibility very seriously.

I have been a member of the American Medical Women's Association for many years. As a student, I participated in its activities with members of the Oregon branch, and when I joined the national, it was because I had observed such fellowship with one another and with the women students by members of Portland's Branch #5. As a practicing physician, I wanted to continue to enjoy the contact with fellow women professionals, and hoped, also, that I could lend help and support to women students and prospective students that had been shown me. I have continued to enjoy the local medical women's activities, and have made some fast friends through the Seattle area meetings. For a long time, however, even though I was a member of national, I did not find it possible to share actively in the organization's annual program. I was too busy getting started in my medical practice and handling family responsibilities. The Journal and the newsletters did keep me in touch during that period.

I attended my first national meeting in 1966, in Washington, D.C., at the urging of three nationally active members of Branch 37. A scheduled tour of the White House made the meeting sound even more exciting. I remember the scientific program somewhat. I remember that business meetings took place. But what I recall most vividly were the hands of welcome and friendship extended to a newcomer, and the exhilarating experience of discussing women's issues, formally and informally, with other conference registrants. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Much as I did, however, I was not yet "hooked" on regular participation in national affairs. It took about three or four more years before I could share with professional persons some special problems and work with them toward the achievement of some common goals. I saw how much we could learn from and support

physicians in leadership positions," and "this is an organization which supports an educational effort on behalf of passage of the Equal Rights Amendment." Membership recruitment will receive high priority in the year ahead.

Second, the *Journal*—The *Journal* must receive special attention this year. Rising production costs, declining advertising revenue, and changes in postal rates have all created financial problems for the *Journal*. The readership of *JAMWA* was queried at the 1979 meeting, and responded that it wished to continue receiving the information contained in the *Journal*, such as news of women in medicine, legislative issues of concern to women, and issues facing women medical students, but not necessarily scientific information, which can be obtained from other publications. Your hard-working Publications Committee has presented recommendations which will need study this year.

Third, The National Office—We will be looking at ways that the National Office and its facilities can become better known and better used by the membership. Perhaps conference space now available may be used for certain Board or Committee meetings. Perhaps conference telephone calls may quickly resolve some dilemmas. Do we have enough staff members to serve the needs? Do we have enough equipment of the right kind? This will be carefully investigated during the year.

Fourth, Financial Obligations and Needs—Do we have enough money to do what we feel needs to be done? Are budgetary problems inhibiting growth and our responses to needs of the membership? This item will need further clarification.

Fifth, The Professional Resources Data Bank—I will be looking at ways, as have the presidents who preceded me, to fully utilize qualified women physicians in policy-making bodies and offices.

Women physicians, and especially AMWA members, are all very special people to me. I am extremely proud to have been selected to represent such an illustrious body in 1981.

I look forward to working with you, and I hope that you will turn a large measure of your boundless energy into promoting the goals and objectives of AMWA. The diversity of your collective experiences, your fields of practice, and the geographic areas you represent, can add real strength and vigor to the organization.

In the year which is beginning, I hope that this organization will continue to develop a model program that demonstrates what can be accomplished by women for women. I hope we will take strong action to assure that opportunities for women in medical education and women in medical practice and academia become equalized. I look forward to working with each of you. I enter this term of office very optimistic about the year ahead.

tations of the membership are changing, and we must, therefore, put our heads together to look at where we have been, where we are now, and where we hope to be in two and five and ten years.

The American Medical Women's Association is a democratic one, in which we all have a vote. There are established routes of communication through the committee structure and the Executive Board, and we hope that the membership will make its needs and desires known through these channels. I will be depending on each of you, in the coming year, to submit your ideas and to give us your assistance. I solicit your views anytime—here at the convention or by mail and by telephone in the months ahead. I will take the information that you submit, attempt to define immediate issues and needs, assign tasks, and myself work diligently to do those things which will keep our organization a strong and effective one. I suspect that I may stumble more than once in attempting to do this. But I would rather stumble attempting to find the right course for us than remain still and comfortable in avoiding previously uncharted actions. With your help, I feel that any problems we encounter can be handled.

At the time of this writing, political campaigns are in the air. Candidates' slogans and platforms are before us via all the media. Promises are glibly given and confidently received. As we move into the 1980s, what can I pledge to you? Only this—that I will do my best to represent you well. I will learn, as quickly as possible, all that I can about issues facing the Board. I will work with your officers, committees, and employed staff to respond to your needs. I will make every effort to keep lines of communication open between us. I will be attentive to the business and financial matters of the organization. I will actively encourage liaisons with other organizations and agencies when such liaisons will be of benefit to our organization and its goals. I will support our continued sponsorship of quality Continuing Medical Education courses. I will, in every way that I know how, attempt to be an effective leader, worthy of the confidence you have placed in me.

There are some special items that will be of concern to me this year:

First, membership—Probably every woman physician ever contacted regarding membership in AMWA has responded with: "Why? What's in it for me?" We have to be able to answer that question for each prospective member by telling her: "This is an organization that provides you with a unique opportunity to work with fellow professionals for something you believe in," and "this is an organization that promotes medical career opportunities for women," and "this is an organization which provides personal contact and fellowship with women physicians in all fields of practice," and "this is an organization which cosponsors workshops for women