

Meet Jonathan Scharfstein, M.D. 2023 - 2024 AMCNO President

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN MEDICINE?

I became interested in the sciences, especially biology, in high school and then majored in biology in college. I became attracted to the idea of helping others through a career in medicine while in college. Research in academic medical labs during my summers and volunteering in emergency rooms cemented my desire to become a physician. I was enthralled by the opportunity to provide urgent/emergent care to patients in need and the translation of physiology to disease.



Dr. Isenberg handed the gavel over to newly elected President, Dr. Jonathan Scharfstein.

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR PRACTICE

I am originally from Brooklyn, New York where I grew up rooting for all New York sports teams and playing basketball as much as possible. After attending Midwood High School, I spent the next fourteen years moving up and down the east coast for my education. I attended undergrad at Princeton University, medical school at the University of Pennsylvania, internal medicine residency at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, and cardiology and interventional cardiology fellowships at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. I met my wife, Suzanne, along the way in medical school (who became a pediatrician), and we had our three daughters- each born in a different city along our travels. Through serendipity, we moved to not-so-sunny Cleveland in 1994, much to the chagrin of my Los-Angeles-born wife. I have been an interventional cardiologist in the Cleveland area since that time – first at Mount Sinai, then at University Hospital of Cleveland, and eventually at Hillcrest Hospital in 2000. After 11 years in private practice at Hillcrest, I joined the Cleveland Clinic. I am a member of the acute interventional STEMI (ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction) team and have spent many years travelling from my home in Shaker Heights to Hillcrest Hospital in Mayfield Heights at all hours of the day and night attending to patients with acute myocardial infarction. In addition to the interventional work, I have a large outpatient cardiology practice. I have also been involved in cardiology leadership at Hillcrest for over 15 years as co-chief of cardiology and Medical Director of the Coronary Care Unit and the Chest Pain Center. In these roles, I have helped review and improve all pathways and processes in the evaluation of chest pain at Hillcrest as well as review quality issues to ensure the delivery of excellent cardiac care.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

First, I am most proud of my family. I have an incredible wife who decided to work part time after our children were born. She balanced pediatrics at MetroHealth with being a mom in a way that worked best for our family. We have three amazing daughters who are so intelligent, thoughtful, and accomplished each in their own way and profession. I am also proud of the work I have helped lead at Hillcrest in cardiology. I have spent the last 23 years as part of a large team that has managed to provide such outstanding care that we have achieved recognition at the national, state, and local levels.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES & INTERESTS?

My wife and I love to travel, and we have made frequent international trips now that our nest has been empty for the past eight years. We have travelled extensively in Europe and South America and are saving the longer trips to Asia and Africa for retirement. I am an avid golfer which occupies a lot of my time during all seasons except winter. When winter comes and (outdoor) golf takes a back seat, I am a member of Mayfield Curling Club and curl at least once a week. I also like to read nonfiction books, attend the theatre, and put together photo books of our travels. One of the few benefits of the pandemic was time to develop some new hobbies and interests – one of which is brewing beer at home. My specialty is brewing IPAs. If my college professors were astute enough to explain that brewing is all about chemistry and biochemistry, I think I would have enjoyed chem lab a lot more! Another chemistry-based hobby that I picked during the pandemic is pickling – I make a great dill pickle and assorted other pickled vegetables.

WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF HEALTH CARE?

My concerns about the future of health care include physician burnout, physician status dilution, scope of practice, integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and government interference with the physician-patient relationship.

Physician burnout was exacerbated by the pandemic and continues to be a major problem. Many physicians are retiring earlier than they planned, and many cite burnout as one reason why. The many causes are varied and include managing the EMR inbox tasks that exploded during the pandemic with the dramatic increase in EMR usage by patients and the increasingly burdensome work for physicians negotiating with pharmacy benefit managers and insurance company prior authorization departments – to name just a few. The attempts to alleviate these problems have been insufficient. The solutions are not simple, but if we do not address this issue, the predicted shortage of physicians to care for our aging population will be amplified. I am concerned about scope of practice issues and the leveling of physicians and other health care professionals as equivalent providers. While physicians are extremely thankful for the excellent support from advanced practice providers (APPs), our duty at the AMCNO is to remind hospital administrators and insurers that the many years of advanced training to attain an M.D, or D.O. degree brings with it an expertise that is unique to medicine and should be valued for its advanced merits. With the recent Dobbs Supreme Court decision and the many state laws restricting a woman's access to reproductive health care, I am concerned about any policy that impinges on the sanctity of the physician-patient relationship. I am deeply troubled by any policy that would impose criminal penalties upon physicians for acting in the best interest of their patients and force a physician to choose between their oath to do no harm and their civil, criminal, and financial livelihoods. I am also very concerned about the ability for Ohio to properly educate future medical professionals. In fact, a recent study has already shown a significant decrease in the number of graduating medical residents in OB-GYN choosing to practice in states (like Ohio) that have legislation in place or pending that place restrictions on abortion access.

I am both excited and concerned about the implementation of advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and how it will impact medicine. Physicians will embrace the many exciting advances in AI that will improve patient care and safety. My concern relates to any use of AI in a way that negatively impacts the physician-patient relationship and the implementation of AI methodology without very careful and rigorous study of its impacts.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE AMCNO THIS YEAR?

My goals for AMCNO this year are to build upon major successes and initiatives that were launched in 2022. I want to see the Academy build upon its great achievement with the Future Leaders Council. It is inspiring to engage the future leaders in medicine and expose them to the importance of advocacy for physicians and the medical profession. We also expanded our community service events last year and held more social events for the physician community than ever before. My goal is to expand these events even more this year.

Another important goal for this year is to prepare for the Academy's bicentennial in 2024. The Academy is the oldest professional organization in Ohio and one of the oldest physician organizations in the country. The breadth and depth of the Academy's engagement with and service to Northern Ohio's medical and patient communities for the past 200 years is astounding. From service in the Civil War and World War II to playing a critical role in every infectious outbreak in the region (Cholera, Smallpox, Polio, Covid-19, and more) to programming on local radio and TV stations for dissemination of medical advice, the Academy has been at the forefront of all health care related issues in Northern Ohio throughout its history. Along with the AMCNO staff, my goal is to use our bicentennial achievement to reengage with our physician membership, attract new philanthropic funding to support our mission, and celebrate with the entire Northern Ohio medical community at our Bicentennial Gala on May 4, 2024.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO PHYSICIANS ABOUT SUPPORTING THE AMCNO?

I would say – C'mon join us! We are here for you. We advocate for you in Columbus and in Washington, D.C. We have many resources to support your practice. We can connect you with other physicians with similar interests.

