



# The time has come for AAPI to move forward politically

I am pleased by the many successes AAPI had during the past year I served as director of legislative affairs. We demonstrated much needed value to our current and prospective members by engaging the organization on a much deeper level on legislative matters affecting physicians. While we had many victories, much more needs to be done to grow AAPI into a powerhouse in the years and decades ahead.

Many AAPI members have amassed enormous personal wealth through their persistence and hard work. Despite this, AAPI still does not have a political action committee. This demonstrates a lack of willingness to pool resources and trust others to turn the organization into part of a mainstream medical coalition. Nobody does business in Washington, DC without a PAC. The fact that AAPI has failed to create this basic political tool demonstrates to politicians on Capitol Hill that the organization has yet to reach the political maturity necessary to be a key player on health-care matters.

If AAPI wants political leaders to understand its issues, the organization must in turn have a PAC that supports



DINO  
TEPPARA

them. Each member on their own can make some progress in the political arena with financial contributions. Restrained by limits placed by federal law on such contributions, our effectiveness is limited. However, by pooling resources into a PAC, AAPI gains strength in numbers and vastly increases the likelihood of political power and influence.

If 100 AAPI members donated \$100 to a PAC, AAPI could raise \$10,000. If 500 members donated \$100, AAPI could raise \$50,000. And if 1,000 members each gave just

\$100, AAPI could have a PAC valued at more than \$100,000. It is the concerted effort to raise small amounts of funds from a large donor pool that will reap success. In fact, most large corporations and associations maintain PACs and they raise money from their employees in small, voluntary, monthly contributions. AAPI can employ similar methods by collecting either monthly or quarterly donations online, creating a PAC program for donors and ensuring that AAPI's voice is heard in the halls of Congress and in state legislative bodies.

The time for AAPI to move forward politically has come. AAPI must start a bipartisan PAC, put aside political differences, and come together, both local chapters and national AAPI members. Most importantly, AAPI members must learn to trust one another when it comes to finances and engage in transparency. If AAPI can come together in this fashion, it will be promoting the best interests of physicians of Indian origin and remain true to the founding principles of the organization.

*Dino Teppara is director of legislative affairs, AAPI*

# India-US physicians exchange program set up

◀ Page A16

other health ministry and Indian Medical Council officials. They were all supportive of the project. I've also been meeting with (Indian) Ambassador (to the US) Meera Shankar and the science counselor at the embassy here in Washington Dr (D) Dutta and Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Mr Robert Blake and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia Mr Michael Owen — the former consul general in Mumbai — and they all provided encouragement and support."

Shah said AAPI President Dr Vinod 'Vinny' Shah and the incoming president Dr Ajith Singhvi "also committed AAPI's support for this on a long-term basis and said it would be unveiled during the convention."

He said the project will "uplift medical education and health care in countries involved mainly by the service and expertise of the US physicians'. It will also have follow-up and continuity without much of a bureaucratic hassle because the State Department would help in working out this aspect of it and since the APXA site provides a free matching service, physicians who are interested can log in and get all the information and application details."

Shah said, "We decided to start with India because in many ways we've gotten these exchanges going

for some years, mainly because AAPI has been involved in CME (*continuing medical education*) programs for more than a decade now. So, the Indo-US program would not only involve the present generation, but generations to come benefiting India in ways that will help uplift medical education, training and health-care in general in our motherland. India has some 700,000 allopathic physicians with about 70,000 specialists and of the 950,000 American physicians, more than 45,000 are Indian-American physicians. This enormous professional manpower will

surely make a significant contribution in medical education, health care, research and other related areas taking medical care in India to new heights. This activity will surely benefit people throughout India and hopefully will reach the middle and lower income groups in the rural areas. This is not going to be a wholly one-way street benefiting only India, because the American physicians who visit India will also be able to learn about not only local and traditional medical practices but also many tropical diseases which can be of great value as the program expands to

other countries under the project."

Dr Jayesh Shah, chairman of the AMA's international medical graduates section, said, "We are very proud and supportive of this American Professional Exchange Association program and we agree that a free voluntary service that matches physicians from the United States with physicians from other countries is a very unique and valuable program."

Navin Shah, a Maryland-based urologist, since 1980, either with the blessings of AAPI or by striking out on his own, has been unrelenting in his quest to improve

health-care and medical education in India. He has done everything from launching medical equipment donation schemes to hospitals and medical colleges in India to taking delegates and specialists to lecture and conduct seminars and workshops, in addition to contributing funds, largely of his own, to equip a medical library at his alma mater in Pune.

He has been the catalyst in a US-India program to bring Ayurveda to America in a big way, and published a book — *Fight for Equality* — about international medical graduates' fight for equal treatment in the US in the early years of immigrant physicians. He was also the driving force behind the setting up of emergency medical services and trauma centers based on the US template in Mumbai. This program has been replicated in some of the major cities in India, including New Delhi, and for his sustained effort that bore fruit in April 2007, Shah was honored with the 2007 India Abroad Community Achiever Award.



Outside the emergency ward of G B Pant, Kashmir's only pediatric hospital, in Srinagar, on World Health Day, April 7. The Indo-US physicians exchange program can help raise Indian medical care standards, experts believe

FAYAZ KABLI / REUTERS

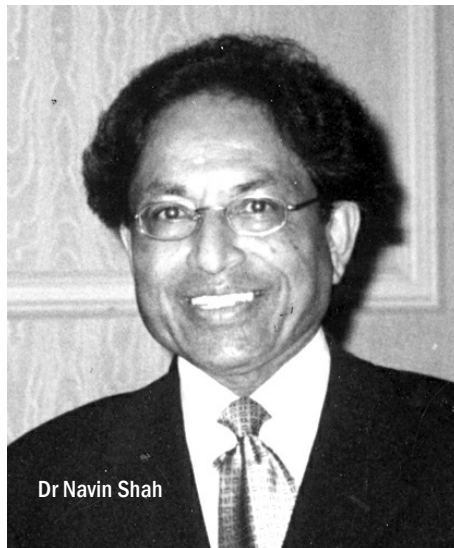


# India-US physicians exchange program set up

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With the blessings of the State Department, the World Health Organization's Global Health Workforce Alliance, the American Medical Association, the American Association of Physicians of Indian origin and the government of India, former AAPI president Dr Navin Shah has set up an Indo-US Physicians Exchange Program that envisages voluntary mutual exchanges between American and Indian physicians to help improve medical education and health-care in India.

Under the aegis of the American Professional Exchange Association — which will provide this service free for this initiative — American and Indian physicians will be matched for voluntary and mutually agreed reciprocal visits, where the hosts will provide free lodging, board and



Dr Navin Shah

professional interactions to their guests.

"About two years ago," Shah explained, "I met with Ms Christina Miner, managing director of the Office of Professional and Cultural Exchanges at the State Department, and discussed this project of American physicians' voluntary visits to developing and underdeveloped countries to provide expertise and services to improve medical education and health-care in those countries, which would also be a great effort in projecting American goodwill. I told her that out of the 950,000 American physicians practicing here, 222,000 have immigrated from more than 100 different countries, and most of these physicians would be happy to contribute their skills and services to the country of their origin."

Shah said Miner embraced the initiative wholeheartedly and "after multiple meet-

ings it was decided to start the program with a phase one zeroing in on six countries — India, Egypt, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa and Turkey." Subsequently, he continued, "I presented this project to AMA officials and they immediately agreed to support the program and so did AAPI. I also discussed the program with WHO's Executive Director of the Global Health Workforce Alliance Dr Mubashar Sheikh, and he too immediately and very enthusiastically came on board."

The APXA has established a Web site for this purpose at [www.apxamembers.com](http://www.apxamembers.com)

Shah continued, "I also visited India twice and got a favorable response meeting with the Health Minister Mr (Ghulam Nabi) Azad and the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Mr (T K A) Nair and

▶ Page A20

## Galaxy of stars to address AAPI gala

◀ Page A8

The opening was to be preceded by yoga, *pranayam* and meditation led by yoga guru Baba Ramdev, and continuing medical education sessions for which participants were to receive credit — invaluable for renewing their medical licenses.

In the afternoon 11 buses were to transport 550 physicians from 27 states to Capitol Hill where they were to fan out and meet their respective representatives and senators and lobby their concerns and issues. They were to then congregate in the Emancipation Room under the Capitol Dome for a reception, expected to attract at least 60 lawmakers from both the House and Senate.

"We are expecting a strong presence because Congress is in session," Vinny Shah said. His close friend and neighbor, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Maryland Democrat, was to preside over the reception. Hoyer's family are patients of Vinny Shah and his medical group in St Mary's County, and Hoyer facilitated Shah's recent meeting with President Obama where Shah handed over a memorandum from AAPI offering its support for health-care reform and also detailing its concerns and issues.

After the Congressional reception, and the return of the physician lobbyists to the Gaylord, Shah said, the reception and dinner that were to follow were to be "a celebration of the Gujarat state and we are hoping that our Chief Minister Narendra Modi will be available by video-conference and he will have a message to give to us."

He continued: "We are all going to celebrate the diversity of our background, and on the second day of the convention, the theme will be Unity in Diversity. We all come from various states in India, but we are all united for one common goal — and that is to provide excellent health care and be a goodwill ambassador for our motherland, India, and our adopted land, America."

Friday, June 25, according to Shah, there were to be "highly specialized sessions with several leading hospital CEOs from Medstar Health, INOVA Fairfax Systems, and others, and also from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services."

The CMS senior officials were to be led by Dr Kenneth Simon, senior medical officer; Troy Barksy, head, division of payment; Dr Subhash Dugirala, senior administrator; and John Blum, director of Medicare Management.

Medicare reimbursement is of major concern to all physicians and hence, Shah said, this was to be "an important session both in terms of learning all of the nuances of Medicare reimbursement and also where reimbursement issue is headed and what is in store for us physicians under the new health-care reform proposals."

Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of health and human serv-

ices, panelists were to include Dr Maraget Hamburg, commissioner, Federal Drug Administration; Indian Ambassador Meera Shankar; Dr Kalpalatha Guntupalli, the only woman president of AAPI and currently president, American College of Chest Physicians; and Ashriya Patil, who is working in Latur, an earthquake stricken area in India where, Vinny Shah said, "she is helping the poorest of the poor by virtue of providing primary care. And, we are going to collaborate with her both in terms of sending primary care physicians to help in the work of her organization and also helping with transfer of technology to alleviate the lot of these people."

The dinner reception, during which Dr Raj Shah and Penn were to keynote, Vinny Shah predicted, "would be one phenomenal evening."

He said that Penn "is an extremely compassionate individual and he cares for the poorest of the poor. His work in Haiti has been remarkable and some of our own Indian-American physicians have worked closely with him. That's why we worked overtime to get him to come and be our keynoter speaker. He's going to energize the audience and get the message out that there is something beyond practice of medicine, and that is to serve humanity."

On the final day too, there was not going to be any dearth of sessions and speakers, with the likes of Dr Natwar Gandhi, chief financial officer, District of Columbia; former US Congressman and now chairman of

PhRMA, Bill Tauzin; Dr Francis Collins, director, National Institutes of Health; and Indian Health Minister Health Ghulam Nabi Azad, among the featured line-up.

Vinny Shah said that while Tauzin "who is an extraordinarily powerful man, who heads all the pharmaceutical companies, will talk about the recent developments in research and development and in cancer chemotherapy and gene therapy and nano-technology," Azad was to speak to how AAPI and Indian health-care systems and institutions could continue to "bring the highest quality medical research in India."

Shah added that throughout the convention, "spiritual guru Swami Ramdev will continue to talk of the role of yoga and meditation in healing the mind, spirit and body. So, we will bring our eastern philosophy to Western society. Juxtaposed with the advances of medicine, it will be a medical and spiritual fusion."



Baba Ramdev



Renu Khator



Sonal Shah

es, and President Obama's point person for implementing the health-care reform process, was to keynote the luncheon. This was to be followed by Chopra and Kundra talking about the innovative ACOs provision in the health-care reform, which envisages large groups of physicians to partner with medical institutions including CMS to create a public-private partnership to improve health-care access and outcomes by practicing evidence-based medicine using innovative technology and, in the process, reduce costs.

Vinny Shah said his medical group was "hoping to be among the first pilot projects in this endeavor in Maryland because we have 102 doctors in my group and an additional 350 doctors in Maryland, who are in our network across eight hospitals. So, we are in a perfect position to have that project start as CMS and the government is ready."

The major session, later in the afternoon, was to be the Women's Forum, and besides Shivam Mallick Shah and