

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

2020 REFLECTIONS: IT IS ABOUT OUR PEOPLE

Karen DeSalvo, MD, President, SGIM

My year as SGIM president has been a rewarding and stimulating time learning to represent not only the members and our interests but also to balance the expectations coming at us from all directions. As I reflect on SGIM, one of the things I love about this organization is that our people are a priority—the members, the staff, and the communities we serve.



As I write this, I am closing out my year as SGIM president. It has been a rewarding and stimulating time learning to represent not only the members and our interests but also to balance the expectations coming at us from all directions. There is no playbook for being president of SGIM so I have relied upon the good counsel of prior presidents, the Council, other leadership, our SGIM staff, and always, my brilliant husband, Jay.

Jay has mastered work/life balance in a way that I never will. He is great at prioritizing the things that matter. One of the lessons I learn from him is that, when in doubt about how to select between your personal life and work priorities, *put your people first*—they are the lasting part of our lives, not the work. There will be plenty of opportunities that arise for professional advancement or to make an impact in the world. As I reflect on SGIM, this is one of the things I love about this organization. Our people are a priority—the members, the staff, and the communities we serve.

The past year has been a busy one for SGIM and our members as we have worked to put people first. We have found many ways to continue to strengthen the people part of what we do, including the organization that supports us. We have also made strides in shaping the environment in which we work and where our patients live and receive care.

The reality is that some of the successes we achieved this year have been years in the making. Each SGIM president has a focused area of priority for their term. I chose the social determinants of health (SDOH) which will be our Annual Meeting theme and the topic of an SGIM position statement. But SGIM presidents also strive to see that the members, staff, and our key partners see continuity year over year in our strategy, major organizational

priorities, and work effort. This means respecting the work that was started in prior years and ensuring that we follow through. It also means seeking to minimize distractions from the many competing priorities and issues that daily come through the inbox of SGIM leadership. We are constantly working to find balance in maintaining a focus on core priorities that can be achieved within our resources against the issues and new opportunities that arise every day.

One way we have stayed on track is by anchoring our work across the following four strategic goals:

1. Promote scholarship in person-centered and population-oriented approaches to improving health.
2. Foster the development of general internal medicine leaders in academic and other settings.
3. Ensure organizational health, including a thriving staff.
4. Advocate for our vision of a just health system that brings optimal health for all people.

I am proud of the way the SGIM team has prioritized our work and partnerships to align around these four goals. I want to give you a snapshot of the kinds of progress we have made across our strategic goals since some of it may not be apparent. This work largely reflects the work of many people—not only the work of our talented staff but also of the scores of volunteers who give time and talent to advance our SGIM mission.

Goal 1: Promote scholarship in person-centered and population-oriented approaches to improving health.

- The *Journal of General Internal Medicine* continues to be a strong platform for research publication and has a current impact factor of 4.6. In addition to its success as an academic vehicle, it has evolved with

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an improved social media presence and a move to an online version following a successful contract renegotiation with our publisher. Thank you to everyone who made the choice to reduce our environmental impact through selecting the online version rather than the paper journal.

- The SGIM *Forum* continues to be timely, relevant and entertaining. Thank you Joe Conigliaro for your tireless service as Editor. You will be missed in that role! The *Forum* is a wonderful way for us to share ideas and will be even timelier next year as we move to an online-only version. Our new editor will be announced soon and will have the chance to learn from our experienced Managing Editor, Frank K. Darmstadt. It has been a joy learning from Joe and Frank this year.
- We hosted a round of regional meetings that were more successful than ever. Early results from evaluations are that they were well received. We provided innovations, such as POCUS training, and some meetings had SDOH as a theme to mirror that of the national meeting. Eric Bass attended nearly all of them and Council members were also engaged. We wanted our members to have a chance to share their thoughts with us about how the organization is doing. In my visits to two regional meetings, I was blown away by the talent—especially of the trainees who are the next generation of academic generalists.
- We are well underway with planning for the Annual Meeting to be held in Birmingham. Thank you to the team for their work to ensure we have another strong vehicle at which members can network and showcase their work. We are also taking advan-

tage of the opportunity of being in Birmingham to spotlight the importance of a key social determinant, civil rights, to driving health outcomes.

Goal 2: Foster the development of general internal medicine leaders in academic and other settings.

- Providing formal opportunities for career development is one of our core efforts at SGIM. Last year, we did deep work by a Task Force established by Giselle Corbie-Smith during her presidential year. That group defined the scope of career development programs at SGIM and outlined a roadmap to better harmonize curricula, evaluation, and other processes, like recruiting mentors. We are again making strides on that plan after bringing on board the newly established role of director of education.
- We successfully launched the Academic Hospitalist Academy 2.0 in partnership with the Society of Hospital Medicine.
- The organization continued to provide opportunities for our SGIM leaders on the national stage, including representation on national groups like the National Academy of Medicine Future of Primary Care Panel.

Goal 3: Ensure organizational health, including a thriving staff.

- This continued to be an area of intense focus for SGIM. We moved ahead with recommendations from a consultant report on how to strengthen our organization. For the first time in years, we have a full complement of staff.
- We worked to improve organizational processes that many of you may have experienced first-hand such as streamlining membership renewal. In addition, the Membership Committee put

forward a robust report that will guide action for the next few years.

- The Board of Regional Leaders harmonized some of the processes in the regions, such as leadership roles for their meetings and recognition programs. This not only aids in creating some alignment across the regions but also allows SGIM staff supporting the meetings to have more consistency.
- SGIM continued to be financially healthy. This was strengthened by successful development including donations from members and support from external sources, such as philanthropy and the Veterans' Administration.
- Council approved our inaugural enterprise wide dashboard to track our progress in our strategic goals.

Goal 4: Advocate for our vision of a just health system that brings optimal health for all people.

- SGIM strengthened its relationships with the American College of Physicians and Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine to advance our shared policy efforts, such as primary care payment and research and education funding. Partnerships like these allow SGIM to have a broader policy impact than we would be able to alone.
- After years of dogged effort, we saw the release of the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services proposal that rebalanced the physician fee schedule in a way that supports primary care. Longtime SGIM member John Goodson and our peer members of the Cognitive Care Alliance represented us in countless meetings bringing an evidence based approach to inform policy making. To me this is a model long-term effort, done collabora-

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tively with partner organizations that should guide our willingness to tenaciously take on bold challenges with a long-term view of effort—one that extends beyond the term of one SGIM president or even the terms of a Council but reflect focused strategic attention.

- The Health Policy Committee developed and tested a new approach to policy proposals to improve our ability to respond to high profile issues in the landscape. We tested this new process this year and saw key position statements move ahead including one on Firearms Research. Will continue to iterate this approach as we strive to see that SGIM is part of important policy debates.
- We agreed that we cannot have a “just health system” without addressing social needs of our

patients. A workgroup therefore developed an SDOH position statement to inform our organizational efforts and guide members in their everyday roles.

It is my fervent hope that every member and person on our staff “see” themselves in our work. We are doing it on your behalf and on behalf of the patients and communities for which we serve. But while the work is important, our mission is really about our people: “To cultivate innovative educators, researchers, and clinicians in academic general internal medicine, leading the way to better health for everyone”. SGIM is at its best when it is building leaders who can impact the future of health well beyond what we or our organization can do alone.

SGIM is family to me. Not because of the organization or the work, but because of the people.

Forgive the sentimentality, but those who know me well, will recognize that it is heartfelt. SGIM has been my family that first day that I stumbled into a workshop on running resident clinic at the SGIM Southern Regional Meeting. The people I met that day are now lifelong friends and people I admire. The experiences I have had in my volunteer work with SGIM have made me the person I am today and for that I am grateful. We have a proud history of inclusiveness, passion, caring, and support for our members in a way that isn't stilted or programmed, but warm and familiar. I am proud of our work this past year, but know that no matter what work we take on in the future, or what changes may come, I hope we never lose our essence as an organization—to *put our people first*. It is what makes SGIM special to me and, I suspect, to many of you.

SGIM