



**Nestor A. Ramirez, MD, MPH**  
**ISMS President**  
**2017-2018**  
**Champaign, IL**  
**Neonatal-Perinatal**  
**Medicine/Pediatrics**

# Archived Materials



Illinois State Medical Society

## President's Forum

Nestor A. Ramirez, MD, MPH, Champaign, was inaugurated president of the Illinois State Medical Society (ISMS) during its 2017 annual meeting.

Dr. Ramirez is board certified in pediatrics. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and has an academic appointment as a clinical assistant professor of pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Urbana-Champaign.

Active in ISMS since 1986, Dr. Ramirez serves on its Executive Committee, previously chaired the International Medical Graduate Section Governing Council, the Council on Economics and the Governmental Affairs Committee. He also served as a member of the Council on Education and Health Workforce. He is a member of the American Medical Association and represents ISMS to the AMA as an Illinois delegate. He is also an active member of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Champaign County Medical Society.

Dr. Ramirez earned his medical degree from Pontifical Xavierian University in Bogotá, Colombia. He completed his internship at Saint Ignatius University Hospital in Bogotá, Colombia and his residency at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and University of Tennessee/Le Bonheur Children's Medical Center in Memphis, Tennessee.

Dr. Ramirez's term as president runs through April 2018.



**2017 ISMS President's Address**

## President's Message

### The Opioid Octopus

#### Nestor A. Ramirez, MD, MPH

The opioid epidemic affects the health of millions of our country's citizens. After hearing or reading about it almost daily, we tend to become numb to its very serious effect on our communities – but for the sake of the 116 people who die from an opioid overdose every day, and for their loved ones, we must stay engaged.

Lawmakers and public health authorities have struggled to find and implement effective solutions to this critical issue. As individual physicians we sometimes think that the efforts of one person will be ineffective in dealing with such a large-scale crisis despite all the tools we have to treat our own patients. There may not be a "silver bullet" to stop the opioid crisis in its tracks, but every concerned individual can be a significant part of the solution.

Recent efforts to provide naloxone to addicts, to make it available without a physician prescription, and to train first responders in its use are important life-saving steps. However, they do not treat the underlying problems that led to an overdose. The opioid crisis is like an octopus with many tentacles. Each of them is different in scope, and various groups focus on addressing different parts of the issue, but they all need to be dealt with in a coordinated and collaborative manner.

Physicians, pharmacies, state health departments, manufacturers, federal agencies, members of the community,

and schools – they all have an ongoing role, and they need to continue fulfilling it. Each person in our towns and cities can be an advocate and a support for friends, neighbors or relatives who may be having opioid issues.

All of us can help by preventing drug diversion. Urge your patients to check the places in their home where they might have ANY medications that are no longer used and dispose of them safely. Many pharmacy chains and law enforcement agencies accept unused medications year-round. The DEA holds special collection days twice per year. The next national take-back day will be on April 28, 2018. ISMS has a resource page with information on medication disposal, which includes a link to find disposal sites. Consider sharing the link ([www.isms.org/Take-Back](http://www.isms.org/Take-Back)) through your practice web site and social media accounts.

As physicians, we can educate patients, help prevent opioid misuse, and treat opioid use disorders. Whatever you do to help today, try to do the same, or much more, tomorrow and every day after that. Don't give up – you may be the last line of defense for your patients.



**Nestor A. Ramirez, MD, MPH**  
**2017-2018**  
**ISMS President**  
Champaign, IL  
Neonatal-Perinatal  
Medicine/Pediatrics

## President's Message

### A Season for Giving

**Nestor A. Ramirez, MD, MPH**

As we enjoy the holiday season, people of many different ethnicities and religions are gathering to celebrate their traditions with family and friends. Regardless of the name of the yearly commemoration, the spirit of giving and sharing permeates this season.

ISMS follows a tradition of giving that is ingrained in our service to our member physicians and their families and patients. This tradition goes on throughout the whole year – we never stop giving our best to all our members.

During the holidays, we give our support to the ISMS Alliance holiday card program and raise funds for the ISMS Educational and Scientific Foundation (ESF) to support its many worthwhile projects. We also formed, in partnership with the Illinois Farm Bureau, the Rural Illinois Medical Student Assistance Program (RIMSAP). By providing help in the medical school admission process and low-interest loans that require participants to practice in rural communities after finishing their training, RIMSAP helps students who might otherwise not be able to attend medical school. At the same time, the program promotes access to medical care in rural areas across Illinois.

ISMS also administers the Raymond E. Hoffman, MD,

Medical Benevolence Fund, designed to help physicians or their dependents by providing assistance to overcome a temporary period of economic catastrophe. We are proud to be able to help our members in their time of need.



During this time of the year, we thank all of our members for their commitment to giving to those less fortunate than us. Through medical volunteerism and providing charity care, your giving helps to improve the health and wellness of the people of Illinois.

While the modern world surrounds us with crass commercialism, we strive to follow our higher ideals and contribute to the well-being and happiness of others. It is a good thing that the holidays come during the winter season, as this creates many opportunities to give. Whether it's providing uncompensated care at a clinic, delivering hot meals to a homeless shelter, giving to a coat or mitten drive for children, or donating to one of the many worthy charities in your community, we are blessed with many avenues for giving of our time and talents. Give at your place of worship, with gifts of money or of your time. Give, give, give and keep on giving. You will get instant satisfaction and a lasting feeling of a job well done.

Happy Holidays, and may your god go with you.

## President's Message

### There's More to CME Than Just Keeping our Clinical Skills Sharp

**Nestor A. Ramirez, MD, MPH**

As physicians renewed their license this past summer, I'm sure more than a few paused to consider the question that asks us to affirm that we completed the required 150 hours of continuing medical education (CME) credit over the past three years. It is tempting to ponder that we trained for years to become physicians, we work hard, and we know what we need to know to treat our patients, so it's not such a big deal if we don't get all our required hours this year, right?

Wrong.

The science and art of medicine are among the most rapidly changing of human endeavors, and the medical profession has long recognized that what we learn during our postgraduate training is not sufficient to carry us through what is commonly four or more decades of practice. The treatments we recommend for our patients are grounded in science, and our continuing education should be as well.

We have a responsibility to ourselves and our patients to promote and maintain a high standard of quality for the education we pursue in order to keep up-to-date in our fields. Continuing medical education can only be effective if it follows certain patterns and rules which guarantee the integrity of the process – even though those rules can sometimes be inconvenient for us.

However, there's more to CME than just keeping our clinical skills sharp. The Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) has modified its definition of CME to include "educational activities which serve to maintain, develop or increase the knowledge, skills and professional performance and relationships that a physician uses to provide services for patients, the public or the profession." The key word is relationships, because it is important to maintain the channels of communication between physicians, our patients and other members of the health care team.

*(Continued next page)*

## There's More to CME Than Just Keeping our Clinical Skills Sharp *(Continued)*

Other professionals are now included as participants in the CME process, and we welcome them. Their participation furthers the development of those relationships, and helps us work together more effectively. That said, we must maintain the standard of physician leadership in the health care team.

“The key word is relationships, because it is important to maintain the channels of communication between physicians, our patients, and other members of the health care team.”

ISMS has always been committed to the principles of continuing medical education. We have supported the functions of the staff and the committee that maintain the CME program throughout the state. ISMS accredits the CME programs of several dozen local hospitals in Illinois, and has been able to guarantee the quality and content of their educational activities.

On October 6, ISMS will hold its 30th annual CME Planners' and Surveyors' Workshop. That we have been bringing together CME professionals for so long is a testament to ISMS' efforts to uphold and support the great quality of CME in our state. I thank ISMS and its CME staff for this tremendous and lasting endeavor, and invite you to support and participate in the CME activities in your hospital. I'll offer a brief plug here: ISMS can help you accredit your local activities.

So three years from now, when you have to again attest that you've got your 150 hours of CME, take a moment to remember why those programs are important, and perhaps reflect on how your participation has made you a better doctor than you were before.

I look forward to hearing from you. During my term, I can be reached at [DrRamirez@isms.org](mailto:DrRamirez@isms.org).

## President's Message

### Doctor, When Was the Last Time You Saw a Doctor?

**Nestor A. Ramirez, MD, MPH**

I want to share with you a short tale, almost like an Aesop's fable, because it has a moral at the end.

Shortly after I was sworn in as ISMS President in April, I began having issues with my left big toe. The toe started turning red, then blue, then black as gangrene set in.

I was admitted to my local hospital, where I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and 90% blockage of flow in my left femoral artery. For a short time, it seemed like my blood pressure and my blood sugar were racing to see which could stay above 200 longer!

As a physician reading this might guess, my toe was amputated, a stent was placed in the left leg, and insulin, antihypertensives, anticoagulants and severe dietetic restrictions became my new reality. I'm very fortunate to have access to world-class medical facilities near my home, and extend many thanks to the physicians and support team who helped to stabilize me and guide me toward a new path for personal wellness.

I left the hospital about 2 months ago after a 5-day stay, and it took me a couple of weeks to get back up to speed. I'm happy to say I'm doing well and making significant progress.

All in all, I have lost thirty-seven pounds (and two ounces from the toe), my pressure is stable, my glucose has not been over 140 for over 1 month, and I am happy that I got a second chance at a full and satisfying life.

As I mentioned above, I'm considering this my own personal fable. Every fable must also have a moral lesson. Now for the

moral of the story: This happened because I had not taken care of myself, neglected my own symptoms, postponed vacations, worked long hours, and delayed seeing a doctor.

Does any of this sound familiar? Does it remind you of your own personal situation?

We all hear the words “physician burnout” a lot these days, and they often conjure up thoughts of nervous breakdowns and deep depression. But burnout can take many forms, and avoiding your own basic health and wellness needs is a red flag that should be addressed with urgency. After all, how can we expect our patients to follow our guidance for their health if we are not diligently taking care of ourselves? I know as well as anyone how difficult that can be, so I've include links below to a few resources on physician wellness from our American Medical Association.

I hope that others can learn from my story and avoid losing something much more valuable than a toe. Consider my fable a personal plea: Illinois doctors, PLEASE take care of yourselves! If you neglect your health, you, your family and your patients will suffer much more than if you had worked less, took occasional vacations, and simply enjoyed life.

You may recall from my last column that my motto for my term as president is “ISMS: I Believe.” Those simple words can mean many things. For me, it helped in my recovery knowing that I am a member of a special vocation. I believe in ISMS because the doctors of ISMS believe in me and my well-being. We also believe in you.

# President's Message

## You Are a Vital Part of ISMS

**Nestor A. Ramirez, MD, MPH**

Organizations of all types, but especially professional associations like ISMS, thrive on clarity of purpose. All our passion and expertise won't add up to much if they are not focused on well-understood and worthwhile objectives.

In my inaugural speech to the ISMS House of Delegates, which I had the privilege of delivering at the ISMS annual meeting in April, I said that we should be insistent when stating our goals, persistent in restating our convictions and consistent in our statements to strengthen our position. Having discussed how we can accomplish our goals, I'd like to take this opportunity to lay out what those goals, convictions and statements are, as I see them.

ISMS is, above all, a professional organization that represents and unifies Illinois physicians. Unity is the key word here. Regardless of location, specialty, national origin or other differentiating factors, we are all physicians, engaged in the ethical practice of the science and art of medicine.

Anyone who is paying attention knows that our profession is under siege, and unless we stick together, we will be weakened and torn asunder. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "If we do not hang together, we shall surely hang separately." Of course, many will prefer the more positive tone of our AMA in its former tagline: "Together, we are stronger!"

Unity is a goal in itself, but it is also an engine for action. ISMS is active on a wide array of issues, but it all comes down to this: ISMS serves physicians so that physicians can better serve patients. The key word here is service. Helping doctors overcome the obstacles of daily practice is often ISMS' best tool for promoting the doctor-patient relationship and improving public health.

Of course, we also use our expertise to make patients' lives better. Our success in helping to advance the Network Adequacy and Transparency Act (NAT Act), as well as our ongoing work to promote greater use of advance directives and awareness of prescription drug take-back events, are prime examples of our patient-focused initiatives.

The needs of Illinois physicians and patients will change over time. But ISMS has for more than 175 years protected the profession of medicine, maintained its noble ideals, and given firm support to the myriad tasks and endeavors of Illinois doctors: caring for patients, educating younger physicians, building communities, engaging in charitable activities, and being human. We are dedicated to doing all this for many more years, whatever the future may bring.

Dedication is the key word here. Doctors are just regular people, but with a special propensity to give, share, and care – over and over again. ISMS is dedicated to delivering essential resources and services to our members to help them do these things better.

Whether you are employed, in independent or group practice, hospital-based, rural or urban, specialist or generalist, academic or research, or still in training, you are a vital part of ISMS. We are here to promote unity, service and dedication. As long as ISMS members stand together, the profession of medicine will remain strong, ready to weather whatever storms we may face.

My personal motto for this year is "ISMS: I Believe." I believe in our Society, our profession, and our ability to work together to help our patients and make Illinois a better place to live for all of us. I hope everyone reading this shares that belief – or if you don't, I hope you will reach out to me and give me a chance to share it with you.

I look forward to hearing from you. During my term, I can be reached at [DrRamirez@isms.org](mailto:DrRamirez@isms.org).



# Every Illinois Physician is Indispensable in Protecting Our Profession

**Nestor A. Ramirez, MD, MPH**

Each and every physician is vital and indispensable in our fight against onerous legislation, administrative control of our practices, invasion of the physician-patient relationship, and political overreach that attempts to dominate medicine.

As I turn over the presidency of ISMS to Dr. Katherine Tynus, I reflect upon the personally enriching experiences and the pleasant memories of this seemingly very short year. I visited many hospitals, medical societies and practice groups, large and small. I also spoke with medical students and residents at different levels of training and saw their bright and hopeful view of the future of medicine.

Throughout the length and breadth of the State of Illinois, the vibrant collaborative spirit and the dedication of our physicians are always in evidence. In every location, I felt invigorated by the warmth of the welcome, the strength of the commitment and the firmness of the resolve to maintain and protect our profession.

As I said in my inaugural address, "I Believe in ISMS." I believe that we must support the only group that represents all the physicians of Illinois – young, old, independent, employed, in training, in academia, or retired. If you are reading this, you are already part of the choir, so I should not be preaching to you. We need all physicians to join our Society and provide strength to our advocacy and legislative efforts. Talk to your non-member friends and colleagues and entreat them to become active members of the Illinois State Medical Society.

During my travels it's been suggested that many physicians can't "afford" to pay ISMS dues. (We have not raised dues in almost a decade.) I think that what we can't afford is to lose our Society over just a few dollars per month! Remember the proverb about the war that was lost for lack of a nail in a horseshoe? Each and every physician is vital and indispensable in our fight against onerous legislation, administrative control of our practices, invasion of the physician-patient relationship, and political overreach that attempts to dominate medicine. Don't overlook the power of the many groups who are trying to obtain by legislation that which they did not get by education.

In closing, if you met me during my year as president and we had a moment to chat, there's a good chance I handed you a wooden coin. These coins are something I created several years ago to share as a clever response when someone asks me "How are you doing?" My response is always that I'm A3 and E2: Alive, Awake, Alert, Enthusiastic and, of course, Energetic!

Thank you to the many fine physicians I met during my term as president, and to our Society as a whole for an enriching and personally fulfilling year. I think I am more "A3 and E2" now than I was a year ago!

