

Q&A with Newell E. Warde, PhD, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Medical Society

Dr. Warde retires this month after almost four decades of service

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The May 1984 issue of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal* (RIMJ) reported on the selection of a new Assistant Executive Director at the Rhode Island Medical Society (RIMS):

“Society Executive Director Dr. Norman A. Baxter announced the appointment of Dr. Newell E. Warde as Assistant Executive Director... responsible for monitoring legislative developments and providing staff support for continuing RIMS activities. He replaces Brian R. Clarke who left the Society in March to accept a position with BCBS of RI.

“Currently Assistant Professor of German at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, Warde received his undergraduate degree at Hamilton College (NY) and completed his doctoral training at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. A native of Schoharie, NY, he has been associated with Bates College since 1977.”

Dr. Warde is retiring this month as Executive Director of RIMS, after serving in that capacity for more than three decades. Two years ago, the American Medical Association (AMA) bestowed on him the Medical Executive Lifetime Achievement Award, which honors a medical association executive who has contributed substantially to the goals and ideals of the medical profession. Dr. Warde, a senior member of a group of New England Medical Society executives, served two terms as chair of the AMA Litigation Center Board, among his numerous contributions. At the award presentation, held during the interim meeting of the AMA in November 2019, then AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, acknowledged his professional accomplishments and contributions: “Newell E. Warde has provided continuity, experience, and a steady hand during challenges, crossroads, and legislative battles waged by the Rhode Island Medical Society. A talented writer, advocate, and jack-of-all-trades, Warde

has led RIMS during a period of rapid change in health care – and done so with a clear and fair mind, as well as bold focus on the task at hand and the future.”

In the spirit of those sentiments, the editors of RIMJ, which is published by RIMS, asked Dr. Warde to reflect on his tenure.

Q. What enticed you to accept the position in 1984 at RIMS and switch professions?

A. I was impressed with the historic beauty of Providence and excited by the prospect of working with a true team of professionals (doctors, lawyers, consultants) on real-life public policy issues at a time of ferment in American health care. What could be more important? I had also experienced the opposite of teamwork in academia, so there was a push as well as a pull.

Q. Who has been the most important influence on your professional pathways?

A. Frank O. Stred was Executive Vice President of the Maine Medical Association from 1979 to 1993. Frank and I got to know each other as volunteer officials at college track and cross-country meets. It was Frank who introduced me to the challenges and satisfactions of working for a state medical association.

Q. Of all the roles you assumed as Executive Director of RIMS for 33 years, which resonated with you the most?

A. My four years as chair of the executive committee of the Litigation Center made for challenging and rewarding teamwork with a national perspective. Back home, I enjoyed planning and executing RIMS’ bicentennial celebration in 2012. The events of that year spilled over at both ends into 2011 and 2013 and gave me opportunities to realize a number of my own long-gestated ideas as well as collaborate in new ways with wonderful people, institutions, and organizations I might otherwise not have gotten to



Dr. Newell E. Warde received the AMA's Medical Executive Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019. Congratulating him, at right, is Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH, then Chair of the AMA Board of Trustees. [COURTESY OF THE AMA]

know. I am proud of the ways RIMS found to give to the community in celebrating itself that year.

Q. What do you see as the greatest challenge(s) facing state medical societies today?

A. As long as the environment of medical practice continues to be governed by state laws, state regulations, and state courts, strong state medical societies will remain vitally important organizations for both doctors and patients. However, the inexorable consolidation of the hospital industry and the fragmentation of medicine into subspecialties are two trends that are challenging state societies. Both phenomena tend to alienate physicians from one another and cloud their perception of where their common interests truly lie.

Q. What are your plans post-RIMS?

A. Family, cooking, reading, writing, and lots of travel.

Q. My advice to my successor is:

A. Savor the privilege of working with Rhode Island's physician leaders and medical students, who are some of the world's most talented, committed, and admirable people. ❖