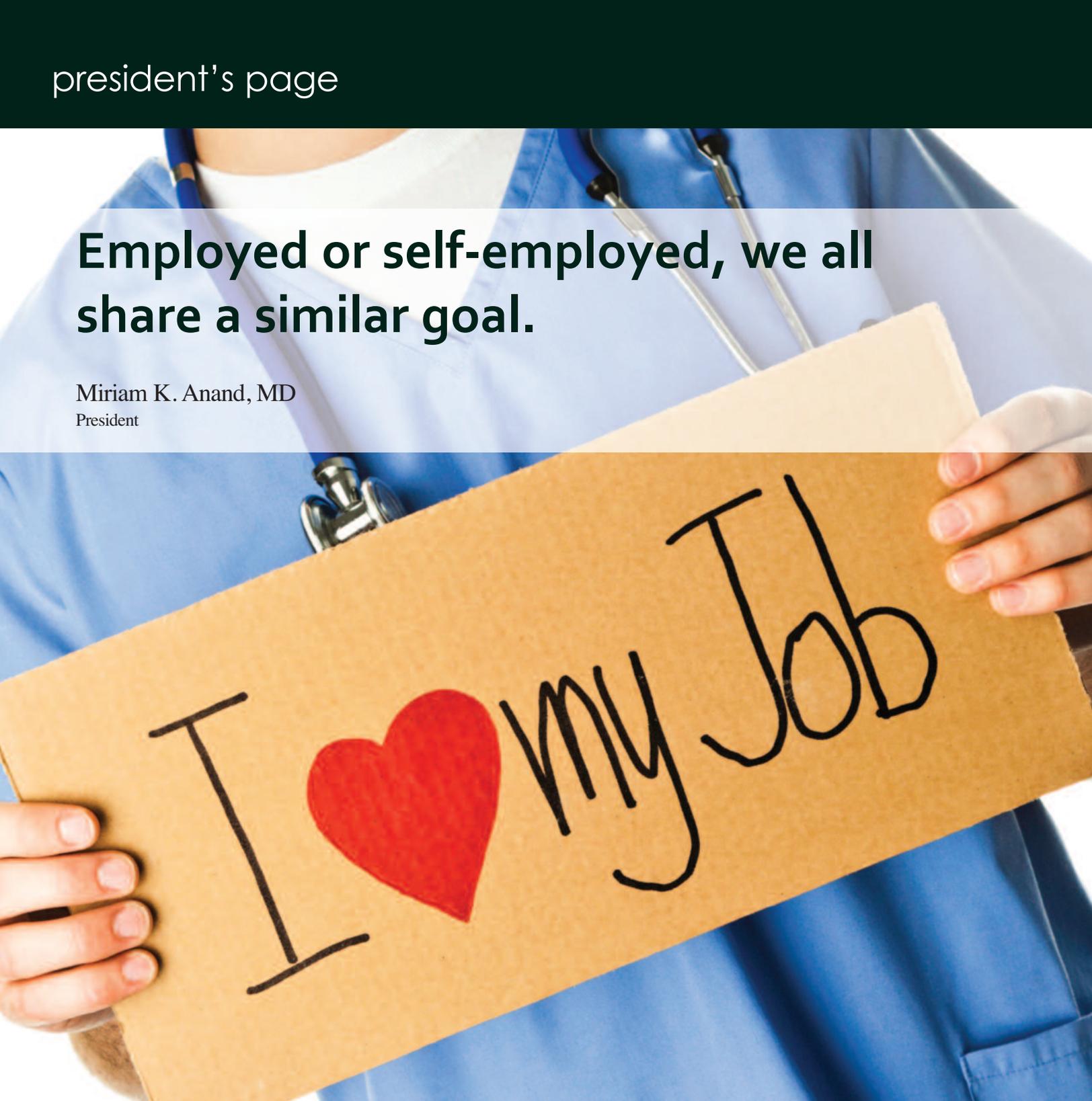


Employed or self-employed, we all share a similar goal.

Miriam K. Anand, MD
President



I love my Job

Change has been a prevailing theme of some of my earlier editorials and our profession has had a lot of changes imposed on us in recent years, with this year certainly being no exception. As mentioned earlier, however, change is really nothing new to medicine and some changes have been much more gradual. As opposed to prior decades, the majority of physicians are now opting for employment and it is estimated that two thirds of physicians today are employed. Younger physicians are more likely to choose employment over practice ownership. Given the ever-increasing burdens of running a practice, which I alluded to in my April editorial, this should really come as no surprise.

As a private practitioner, I can imagine that employment would offer a number of advantages. You can leave work at the office, as long as you're not on call. You can enjoy vacation and time away from work without worrying (or maybe even being aware) of how it will affect the bottom line. Staffing headaches are not yours to worry about and neither are the costs of running the practice. Billing and dealing with insurance companies are generally someone else's concern. The grass does seem greener.

A recent Medscape survey showed that employed and self-employed physicians showed equal overall satisfaction, although self-employed doctors were somewhat more satisfied with their current practice situation than their employed counterparts. The same survey also showed that those who made the switch from employment to self-employment showed greater satisfaction than those who did the opposite, but the latter group reported having a better work-life balance. While many of the employed physicians worked for smaller or large group practices, c. 49% of employed physicians work for a hospital or a practice owned by a hospital.

The Medscape survey showed that employed physicians felt that their opinions and feedback were not important to the employing organization and this may account for the slightly lower satisfaction rates. Most of us are likely familiar with the recent scandal at the Phoenix VA. Many may also be familiar with the story of **Dr. Katherine Mitchell**, a second physician to come forward publically about her concerns regarding patient care at the VA. In a written statement, she said, "I have seen what happens to employees who speak up for patient safety and welfare within the system...devastation of professional careers is usually the end result." It is extremely disheartening that physicians can be punished for expressing concerns about patient care and one can only wonder if it happens in other systems as well.

It is said that most physicians being trained today will expect to be employed, so more likely than not the ratio of employed physicians to those in private practice will continue to rise. This worries me for the future of our profession, not because I am concerned about my own position as a self-employed physician, but because I worry about the continued deterioration of the physician voice. As I

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mentioned in a previous article, employed physicians (with the exception of those in administrative roles) seem to have a layer of separation from pending and proposed changes that affect how we provide care to our patients.

Despite this, a recent study co-sponsored by the RAND Corporation and the AMA found that physician satisfaction

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— Miriam Anand, MD

has been shown to be related to providing high quality care to patients. Employed or not, physicians are all burdened with the stress of practicing in the current climate, in which more and more barriers to providing good care seem to pop up with regularity. Self-employed physicians may have slightly more leeway in making direct changes to improve patient care in their own practices, but employed physicians need a forum for their voices to be heard.

Currently these forums seem to be social media or friends and colleagues. Some of you may be familiar with **KevinMD.com**, a website started by **Kevin Pho, MD** that is self-described as a site that “shares the stories and insight of the many who intersect with our healthcare system, but are rarely heard from.” This site often provides very relevant articles from those “on the front lines,” so to speak, and trigger very interesting threads of discussion. While these outlets may be useful for venting our frustrations, they do little to actually change what is happening in medicine. Membership in organizations such as the Maricopa County

Medical Society (MCMS) allows those concerns to be channeled through a unified voice.

Sadly, however, membership in organizations such as ours is low in comparison to the number of practicing physicians in the county. Those outside of medicine who wish to impose further rules and regulations on us, such as legislators and insurance companies, continue to take advantage of this lack of unity, resulting in the current climate we are all now practicing in. It is the mission of the MCMS to act as a strong, collective voice for physicians and to work in a manner to preserve the quality of medicine.

We want to be able to represent all physicians, both employed and self-employed, but we need to learn more about the particular issues faced specifically by employed physicians. If you are employed, please let us know about the concerns you have and please encourage your colleagues to join the MCMS.

As part of our efforts to provide services to our members, physicians negotiating with prospective employers will be able to take advantage of reduced fees for consultation with an employment lawyer as a membership benefit. We want to be able to expand the benefits that we can provide for our members and be able to include more benefits for employed members, but we need to hear from you. 

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