

# Medical News



L-R: Carol Zurcher, Marni Jameson, Tom Thomas, and Taylor Thomas.

## AID Grows Strong National Voice for Independent Physicians

*Independent doctors now have strong national voice.*

**AUTHORS** **Lynne Jeter**

WINTER PARK –When former *Orlando Sentinel* senior health reporter Marni Jameson received a call from Winter Park CPAs Tommy Thomas and Carol Zurcher to a dinner meeting mid-2014, she assumed the founders of the Association of Independent Doctors (AID) wanted media coverage for their year-old organization.

Instead, Thomas and Zurcher asked Jameson to run AID, whose message struck a chord with independent doctors lacking the time, resources or clout to tackle practice-changing issues. The operation, they explained, had grown beyond their time availability at their practice, Thomas, Zurcher & White CPAs in Winter Park.

It's a David-and-Goliath fight, the CPAs cautioned Jameson.

“Hospitals, insurance and government are encroaching on independent physician practices,” said Jameson, an *L.A. Times* health reporter since 1995 who transferred to the *Sentinel* in 2011. “It’s bad for doctors and their patients, and it’s bad for America. Independent doctors need a strong national voice.”

At its April 2013 organizational meeting, more than 100 doctors ponied up \$1,000 each in seed money for AID, which focuses on ways to offset the negative impact hospital-physician mergers are having on the quality and cost of healthcare. Jameson covered that meeting for the *Sentinel*, which made front page news the following day.

Within a year, AID recruited 280 members spanning several states. Since Jameson joined AID on Sept. 1, 2014, the organization has grown to nearly 1,000 members in 14 states coast to coast.

“To stop the trend of hospital-doctor consolidation, we’ll continue needing more members and resources,” said Jameson. “The greater our membership, the louder our voice, the farther our reach.”

AID chapters have been established in markets with a concentration of members – Maine, the largest with 260 members, Southern California, South Carolina, and Florida.

“AID is spreading the message ... when hospitals buy up doctors’ practices, costs skyrocket, quality goes down, the doctor-patient relationship is weakened, jobs are lost, employer premiums rise, and communities suffer financial harm,” said Jameson.

Last year, the AID office launched a national online directory of independent doctors, and a media campaign to consumers about saving money by seeking independent doctors, which don’t charge facility fees. The organization embraced a new logo, partnered with McKesson on member savings, and dug deep into social media. AID presented at many conferences, including the national MGMA conference, twice on Capitol Hill at the National Physicians Council on Healthcare Policy, at Becker’s Healthcare Forum, and to the American College of Cardiology in Orlando.

When the U.S. District Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld a lower court’s decision in February 2015 that St. Luke’s Health System violated antitrust laws with its acquisition of Saltzer Medical Group, AID celebrated a landmark antitrust victory – and its role in the decision. AID filed an amicus brief with the appeals court asking that it do exactly what it did. This was the first time in the nation’s history that a court ordered an acquisition of a medical group by a hospital to be unwound, and it set an important precedent. “We helped make history,” said Jameson. “Most days are marked by small victories ... the years by great strides.”

AID also fought for transparency to require hospital-owned groups and facilities to make their facility fees transparent to patients. Jameson and two executive committee members – David Branch, MD, and Stephen Bravo, MD, – met with Maine Gov. Paul LePage on transparency and other issues facing independent doctors, while the Florida Medical Association (FMA) endorsed a facility fee resolution written by AID, working with the Orange County Medical Society. The resolution is now in the hands of state lawmakers.

As the association grows in size, so does its voice, said Jameson, who spoke for the third time on Capitol Hill in March, this time proposing “The Doctors’ Law” to lawmakers. The four-point bill would not only save independent doctors, but would also reduce the wasteful overspending in healthcare by billions, she said.

“I’m in a unique position to fight for doctors because I’m not one,” said Jameson. “When they complain, they sound like they’re whining, but when I complain, I sound like a caring American who wants what’s best for our country and for our healthcare system, which is what I am. I tell doctors, you go take out that gall bladder. Let me do this.”

*Join us next month as we learn what AID has in store for 2016.*

### **LINKS:**

[Association of Independent Doctors](#)



LOAD MORE CONTENT