

## **Grant Proposal: Creating the Virtual Mississippi Dermatology Association**

Submitted by the Mississippi Dermatology Association

Ron Lubritz, MD, FAAD President  
Sabra Sullivan, MD, PhD, FAAD Vice-President  
Jennifer Schuilmeier, MD, Secretary-Treasurer

Authors: Dr. Sabra Sullivan, Dr. Ron Lubritz, and Dr. Angela Wingfield

The Mississippi Dermatology Association is requesting a grant to create a virtual presence in the state of Mississippi. The goal of this virtual site is to unite all dermatologists regardless of practice setting, whether private or academic, rural or urban and to lead the way in patient access and education as well as truth in advertising.

The goal of this project is to create a virtual Mississippi Dermatology Association.

The Mississippi Dermatology Association was founded in 1973. It has had a yearly meeting since 1973 open to all Mississippi Dermatologists who are members (or wish to become members and their staff). There have been no dues charged to members since its inception. The association has been very

active at a state and national level for many years. All work has been voluntary, and we have no paid staff. We have had success on many state policy issues that affect our patients as well as being able to provide for them as physicians. For many years this model served the Association quite well. However, changes in technology and information exchange now offer many advantages to our state in particular. We need a virtual association.

Mississippi is a rural state with 3 metropolitan centers located on the gulf coast, the greater Jackson area, and the northern area which abuts south Memphis. All other cities and towns have much lower populations and many small towns exist where there are as few as 500 to 1500 people. Many patients must travel several hours for very common disorders that could be treated effectively closer to their homes. It is not uncommon for a patient to arrive for a single visit and have no means of transportation for follow-up. Additionally, patients have no easy way of finding out if the person they are seeing is a dermatologist or not before their visit or if the physician they are scheduled with treats their condition. The patient has no easy way to find out if the dermatologist is in their insurance network at all (before or during enrollment in some cases).

We are an underserved state. For many years there were fewer dermatologist per hundred thousand patients than in North and South Dakota. Fortunately, we have had an influx of dermatologists at the University of Mississippi and a newly founded residency program. However, we have no single site that links all dermatologists in the state (including all solo, groups, and academic practices) together. The association feels that the dermatologist practicing in the town of 500 with the drawing area of 10,000 should be involved in all dermatology issues as easily as the practitioner in a town of 1.5 million.

A virtual Mississippi Dermatology Association will allow us to bring all dermatologists into the organization on an equal level and keep them updated regardless of physical location or practice setting. This will encourage dermatologists to continue to practice in underserved areas that are in great need their care. It will provide truth in advertising by identifying board-certified/board eligible dermatologists as defined by state law, educating patients about access, dermatologic disease, and resources. This will be an ongoing effort that will not cease after the initial 24-month funding.

The timeline of this project will span 24 months.

The MDA virtual task force will meet with the selected web developer to design the site. Initially this will include the webpage. The Board of Directors as well as the MDA's legal council will approve the content. Once the initial site is up and functional we will continue to expand interactive components as well as proceed

to other forms of social media.

Strategic advertising will be utilized with print and virtual media to raise awareness and invite use of the virtual MDA by the public as well as internal measures for our members.

3Sided Media and designated members/staff of the MDA will monitor and manage the site on a regular basis.

Dr. Lubritz, Dr. Sullivan, and Dr. Wingfield will be responsible for executing this project along with Ms. Rene Megehee, staff. Dr. Wingfield sits on our Board of Directors and is our Advisory Board-Elect member. Ms. Megehee has a 20-year history with the MDA and has worked tirelessly to further the organization.

We will be using 3Sided Media Consulting for web design, expansion, and upkeep. This company has been vetted and has a five-year track record of success.

We anticipate the initial site going live 2/16-3/16 with a members site as well as a initial public site with information/links to Mississippi Dermatologists, Dermatology Disease Support Organizations, Access Issues, Disease Education, and a “What a Patient Might Ask When..... section” which will be an ongoing feature. Within 6-8 months we will have a live video section of “interviews with a dermatologist” where a member dermatologist will provide information on a dermatology diagnosis of interest in a concise format of 5 minutes or less.

We will have 3 outcome measures:

1. Number of hits on website and other social media
2. Number of patients in member's offices who have benefited from virtual MDA (survey at 12 and 22 months)
3. Number of MDA members utilizing virtual MDA