The American Medical Association Medical Student Sector Convention was a great opportunity to network with medical students, residents, physicians, gather ideas on how to improve our chapter, discuss ways we can make a difference on a local, state, regional, & national level, as well as receive advice on our medical careers.

When we reached Chicago on Thursday night, we attended our informal Region 2 meeting where candidates for regional positions were announced, there was discussion over what questions should be asked to the candidates, and conversation over resolutions. For example, one resolution our region was asked to support was one that would declare the AMA’s approval that oral contraceptives are scientifically proven to help prevent ovarian cancer. It was interesting to meet people from our surrounding states, some of which we met and collaborated with this past April when our AMA-MSS Region 2 Conference was held in Kansas City. Afterwards, we got to mingle and network with the other regions at the AMA Headquarters, a chic structure no doubt where much significant actions take place year round.

Friday morning, we first attended the AMA MSS General Assembly, where the national officers formally introduced themselves and projected the plan for the year, which included the updated community service initiative “Healthy Steps,” which will focus on addressing modifiable health risk factors (such as physical activity and smoking). Next we attended a session on global health. It was set up as a forum so people could ask and answer other students’ questions. In this way, we learned about resources that can help with donating/collection medical supplies, what steps to take to ensure a location is safe to go to for a medical mission, and where to go for funding. Next was another forum, but on how to set up a community service project, as well as how to improve chapter involvement & recruitment. I got some ideas I would like to implement into our chapter, such as a competitive blood drive (perhaps between colored units at the School of Medicine, or maybe between health science schools on Hospital Hill). Another ideas was “speed dating for medical specialties” where a group of 6-8 students would get ten minutes at a time with a specialist to ask questions about the specialty. In short, this forum offered a time for us students to share our successes and ideas from our individual chapters and thus help each other expand. Next we participated in the National Service Project of covering the uninsured. We distributed and discussed info on this issue with passersby in a well visited spot in Chicago. This provided a chance for us to share info on resources to people that could benefit from it. After all, there are underused resources available for this purpose. Once we returned to the main conference site, we attended our Regional elections at which our own Kathleen Doo was elected Region 2 Chair. We also discussed which resolutions our Region would support. We then attended our Missouri State Reception where we met physicians from all over the state, including Dr. Barb (who was running for a position), Dr. Cork (who has been helping support our chapter and region), and some other physicians who currently serve as Preceptors for our medical school. They were eager to hear if we were benefitting from the conference, what hot topics were floating around the medical student sector, and what the MSS’s opinions were on health care reform. The reception also gave us a chance to thank the
state for all of their support. After the reception, we enjoyed dinner with Dr. and Mrs. Defeo and Dean Drees and her husband. Here we shared our experiences thus far, and exchanged advice on how to maximize our resources at our school.

On Saturday, we attended a talk by one of our fellow UMKC students, Sandeep Krishnan, the current MSS representative to the NRMP. He spoke about the myths about The Match, which was really helpful as there is so much we do not know about how it works and how it is commonly violated. He even has us run our own mini-Match! We hope he will repeat the talk at our medical school. Next, we were given a brief overview over the major issues of health care reform by Dr. Hertzka, a lively anesthesiologist. Afterwards, we met the MSS Minority Issues Committee who spoke briefly about “Unity Week” which will take place in October in conjunction with organizations such as Asian Pacific American Medical Student Association (APAMSA). Their guest speaker talked about choosing a residency and different kinds of private practices. That afternoon we each had the opportunity to make contacts with doctors of various specialties at the Medical Specialty Showcase. Doctors were eager to tell us about their field, how to prepare for it, where that residency/fellowship is offered, and offer free membership to their specialty association. The day ended with a keynote speech from Dr. Geoff Tabin who as a medical student climbed Mount Everest and turned it into an ophthalmology research project by tracking how the altitude affected the eyes. He later joined the Himalayan Cataract Project that removes cataracts surgically in the Himalayas in efforts to cure blindness. He had many stories of people who were able to see again after years of being blind, a plight that rendered them being a burden on their society from their point of view. It was so inspiring to hear how he found his calling from a wild hobby, and has ended up making such a difference!

Those of us who stayed longer in Chicago were able to attended a “Route 66” Reception, at which were AMA members from Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas. This gave us the chance to meet and get to know students, residents, and physicians as well as learn about the candidates for the Board of House of Delegates. Most of all, we were later also able to watch and listen to President Obama’s address to the AMA on health care reform. This was an amazing experience. We were so fortunate to have the opportunity to be present at this historical and momentous occasion. The president put emphasis on modifiable health factors by ensuring all have primary care. He declared that people who like their insurance plans and doctors will be able to keep them, even if changes take place. Over all, after outlining who goals, he asked for the American Medical Association’s support and emphasized the importance of AMA input on health care reform.

This event was more than enough to remind all of us how significant it is to be an active member of the American Medical Association, even if it is just the Medical Student Sector for now, as we as members can share our opinions with physicians who want to hear it, and have the power to push reform and make a difference through our attempts in policy-making and community service initiatives. We are so grateful the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine was open to supporting us by providing funding for this trip, which was indeed a great learning experience and a chance for us students to see how we can make a difference and thus make our school proud that it yields great physician leaders.