

From my perspective

The 89th annual Clinical Congress took place October 19-23 in the College's hometown of Chicago, IL, and I believe it was one of the most successful meetings we have had in the recent past. I make this statement based on the excitement and positivity many Fellows have expressed with respect to many of the ideas and initiatives emanating from the American College of Surgeons. Our profession is under siege on many fronts, but through constructive attention to and dialogue about the issues, we are responding in a way that will make surgery stronger and more attractive to future generations. All in all, the attendees expressed verbally, as well as in letters to us, that the meeting was extremely well done and was greatly appreciated.

The favorable interest in the meeting also can be measured in part by its attendance statistics. This year, we surpassed the number of health care professionals who attended the 2002 Congress in San Francisco, CA, and the last meeting that took place in Chicago. More than 10,000 physicians and health care professionals participated, along with an increased number of exhibitors. Despite some difficulties with visas, a good number of international Fellows from a multitude of countries were present at the meeting. Additionally, this year, we opened the Congress to medical students, and more than 450 attended. A large cadre of surgical residents from the various disciplines also participated.

Great beginnings

We incorporated many tangible differences into this year's meeting. For example, the Convocation ceremonies took place on Sunday night, and more Initiates were present than has been the case in years past. Also, many more of the Governors participated in the event, which welcomes these young surgeons into our fold.

During the Convocation, the incoming President, Claude H. Organ, Jr., MD, FACS, from Oakland, CA, gave an inspiring talk to the Initiates and announced that his year as President of the American College of Surgeons would be characterized as being the "year of the resident." (An article that is drawn from the text of his address appears on page 8.) I think this attitude typifies the significant value that the College's leadership places on young people and residents. We want to create an



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atmosphere, as well as educational and research opportunities, for these young physicians that excites them and stimulates their interest in the very positive aspects of our profession.

As part of the Convocation, five Honorary Fellows were inducted into the American College of Surgeons, and each brought extremely unique accomplishments to our rank of Honorary Fellows. For instance, E. Catherine Hamlin, MB, BS, DRCOG, made the long journey from Ethiopia, Africa, and received a standing ovation from the audience for her outstanding dedication to treating patients in her adopted country who suffer from vesicovaginal fistulae due to complications during childbirth (see story, p. 29). The entire ceremony was moving and, I believe, meaningful for the new Initiates. Following their initiation, the new Fellows were welcomed by the College's leadership at a large reception in their honor.

The next morning began with the Opening Ceremony, and Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, MD, FACS (R-TN) gave the American Urological Asso-

ciation Lecture entitled “Improving American Health Care for the 21st Century.” He outlined the system’s current limitations and efforts to make it more functional. We were most pleased that he could join us this year to offer his vision for the future.

Unique sessions

Throughout the meeting, a number of unique sessions were presented. This year, we had a symposium on volunteerism, which, for the first time, actually acknowledged the work of surgeons who give their time in the organized provision of charitable care in the U.S. and abroad.

There was also healthy dialogue throughout the meeting about socioeconomic issues affecting health care. For example, during one session, panelists considered how surgeons can become more effective lobbyists in Washington and how we might create a political climate that will help to correct the professional liability crisis. Interesting talks also were given on choosing a surgical specialty and the various options available to young people, as well as pursuing a career in health policy in order to perhaps help formulate an improved health care system in the future.

The whole area of patient safety and quality improvement was a central focus during various gatherings and symposia. The College intends to make significant contributions to the quality movement by hopefully establishing a center that will address this matter and disseminate information about best practices and evidence-based medicine, so that surgeons may learn from others’ experiences.

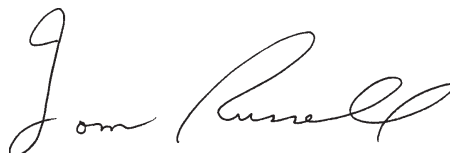
The 80-hour workweek for residents was discussed with great enthusiasm, allowing attendees to think about the ways in which we may adequately train surgeons while abiding by the new time constraints. Interesting talks on risk management and professional liability also were presented. Finally, Ben Eiseman, MD, FACS, assembled a knowledgeable group of military physicians from the U.S. and a surgeon from Iraq to talk about the medical response to the conflict in that country.

Change for the better

The atmosphere at this year’s Clinical Congress was palpably different than what it has been in the past. We have a wonderful profession, and we are working on the issues that have caused prob-

lems in the past. We are trying to create a better environment for surgeons in the present and future.

Many complex issues are before us, which involve not only the health care delivery system, but the training and continued competency of the surgical workforce as well. The College is committed to addressing these concerns. By working with all of you, we will be able to forge a better way of providing surgical care to our patients in the foreseeable future. Your continued help, support, ideas, and suggestions will ensure the College’s viability now and in the years to come.



Thomas R. Russell, MD, FACS

If you have comments or suggestions about this or other issues, please send them to Dr. Russell at fmp@facs.org.