

From my perspective

As you may recall, the cover story and my column in the April issue of the *Bulletin* focused on the proclamation from Claude H. Organ, Jr., MD, FACS, ACS President, that his term would be “the year of the resident.” There are few messages we can send from the College that are more important than one that underscores the importance of young surgeons in training to the future of this organization and, indeed, our profession.

To reinforce that message, we have dedicated this special issue of the *Bulletin* to issues of importance to surgical residents and to the work and activities of the group that has been created for them within the structure of the College. That group, which has been known as the Candidate and Associate Society, was established several years ago to benefit surgeons of the future through involvement in activities of the College. At their meeting in June, the Regents of the College approved a motion to change the official name to the *Resident and Associate Society of the American College of Surgeons* (RAS-ACS) to better reflect a more visible stature for the group and to provide a solid mechanism through which they can raise their concerns and have them addressed. I believe that these actions send a resounding message that the College’s leadership is dedicated to meeting the needs of residents and young surgeons.

Purpose and functions

The RAS is dedicated to identifying the goals and needs of today’s residents and young surgeons in all surgical specialties. Our objective in further enhancing this society is to reach out to and affect 100 percent of the residents in training and the Associate Fellows who are just entering practice and who are striving to become vocal and influential members of the College.

One might ask why the College didn’t have an organization devoted specifically to residents and young surgeons in the past. That is a good question, and it is probably best answered by saying that such a group didn’t seem particularly necessary until recent years. However, no forum could be more relevant today. Clearly, residents have burning issues that must be addressed. Moreover, we all recognize that we must bring them into this organization and keep them



The RAS-ACS provides residents and Associate Fellows with a forum in which to meet and discuss their concerns and to have a real voice within the College.

in it if we care at all about the future of the American College of Surgeons.

Practicing surgeons look to the College to protect their political and financial interests and to provide them with opportunities for continuing education, professional development, lifelong learning, and fulfillment of the requirements for maintenance of certification. We now must acknowledge that as residents face more regulations, new requirements for achieving board certification, and increased debt and lower reimbursement, they need to be part of an organization that understands and responds to their distinct needs. I believe that the RAS provides a unique forum through which their issues can be effectively addressed.

Areas for development

One of the primary goals of the RAS is to open up opportunities for residents and Associate Fellows to serve on College committees and to have a say in the decision-making process, particularly with respect to educational and advocacy pro-

grams. By providing these young surgeons with seats on more committees of the College, we will be taking a positive step toward helping them attain the leadership skills and insights necessary to become influential forces not only within this organization but within their hospitals and training institutions, and within their state and federal governments as well.

Additionally, because the art and science of surgery continue to be inculcated with a bottom-line, business-oriented mentality, we need to ensure that surgeons understand the complexities of coding, reimbursement, and so on. Training programs in the past offered little guidance in these skills because they didn't need to; today, the 80-hour workweek regulations prevent current programs from having time to devote to these important topics. Thus, with the cooperation of the RAS, the College will be developing programs to introduce residents in a formal, didactic way to practice management, coding, debt management, fiscal responsibility, and retirement planning.

We will also be offering programs that will introduce residents to the six core competencies identified by the American Board of Medical Specialties—patient care, medical knowledge, practice-based learning and improvement, interpersonal and communication skills, professionalism, and systems-based practice. Surgeons now must prove their proficiency in these areas in order to attain and maintain board certification.

Questions about whether the time that residents spend in the hospital is used effectively and whether they are employees or students have been raised for decades. However, the work-hour restrictions have heightened the intensity and urgency of these debates. It is quite clear that residents' hours in the hospital will need to be put to good use. Hence, the College, training programs, and other entities will need to create a competency-based curriculum that will begin in PGY-1 with an introduction to the fundamentals of surgery and proceed in teaching advanced operative techniques through the use of simulators and other new technology throughout the remaining residency years. We also must help residents to work as responsible leaders of teams of health care professionals who will be involved in patient care.

To bring this broad educational experience to residents and their training programs, the RAS

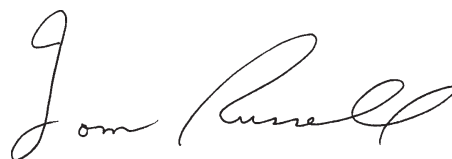
and the College are working on new communication tools that will make better use of electronic methods of information dissemination, including the development of a Web portal for our members. This new technology will allow us to customize information that residents will need and to "push" it to them in an extremely timely and effective way.

Finally, we will continue to expand our job bank, which already is becoming more robust. This service allows young surgeons to seek employment in whatever field interests them, from academic surgery to rural practice, and allows their older colleagues to post available job opportunities.

Spread the word

Surgical residents are our future. Through the efforts of the RAS, the College is well positioned to assist young people as they blaze the trail for tomorrow's patient care. The RAS is developing programs that are sure to ignite greater interest in this organization and in this profession. It provides residents and Associate Fellows with a forum in which to meet and discuss their concerns and to have a real voice within the College. To deny them this sort of presence and visibility would be a serious error.

Every program director in every surgical specialty needs to be aware of the commitment the American College of Surgeons has made to enhancing the educational and professional status of surgical residents in this country. It is only through this commitment that we can truly fulfill our goals.



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