

From my perspective

It is often said that the key to a sound and productive relationship of any sort is communication, communication, and more communication. Hence, a professional organization like the College cannot engage in too many exchanges with its members.

Of course, the focus and formats of these interactions must keep pace with changing technology, as well as with the evolving expectations of the membership. At one time, the College conducted most communication activities through the print media, publishing the *Bulletin*, the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*, newsletters, and letters to the Fellowship. While these materials have continued to be important means of getting information to our members, in the last decade, we also have been reaching out electronically through our weekly electronic newsletter *ACS NewsScope* and through regular legislative alerts sent via e-mail. As our society becomes more computer literate and the “information superhighway” widens, we are finding even greater opportunities to interact with our members and to act as a conduit for them to share their opinions and information with policymakers and the public.

Your valuable input

Communication, of course, is a two-way street, so besides providing information to our members, we have listened to them so that we can learn about and respond to their perspectives and concerns. Committees and individual surgeons have offered valuable constructive criticism and ideas with respect to how the College can better fulfill the needs of modern surgeons.

As an example, the College formed the American College of Surgeons Professional Association (ACSPA) in response to recommendations from the Board of Governors that the College develop a political action committee. The loud and emotional pleas from our rank-and-file membership regarding our need to take the lead in achieving medical liability reform spurred the ACSPA to help establish Doctors for Medical Liability Reform and to direct some significant resources into other efforts to create a political environment that will encourage this type of change.

This year, the College has become more attentive to hearing the point of view of residents and Associate Fellows. Claude H. Organ, Jr., MD, FACS,



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declared this, his Presidential year, to be the year of the resident—a timely pronouncement given the increasing educational, financial, and lifestyle demands on surgeons in training. It is absolutely key to the survival and growth of this organization and this profession that we understand and support the concerns of young people, beginning when they are medical students and continuing throughout their residency and entry into practice.

In response to the building concerns that residents and young surgeons have been expressing, we have activated the Resident and Associate Society of the ACS (RAS-ACS), formerly the Candidate and Associate Society of the ACS. The RAS-ACS publishes a quarterly electronic newsletter spotlighting the interests of its membership. Additionally, members of the RAS-ACS have been invited to participate in the activities of the Board of Regents, the Board of Governors, and other committees, thereby allowing them to voice their opinions directly to the College's leadership. We anticipate that by offering them these types of positions within the organization, they will have opportunities to hone the skills they will need to assume leadership roles within their institutions and the College in the future.

Web portal

It is in this spirit of listening to the pleas of our members that the College has taken very seriously a suggestion from the RAS-ACS and the Committee on Young Surgeons that a new electronic communications tool be developed for all of our members. Thus, in June, the Board of Regents approved in concept and with financial support the creation of a Web portal for its membership, which the young surgeons assert is necessary to enhance communication and interaction between the College and its Fellowship in this computer age. We anticipate that this exciting new communications tool will be launched next summer.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, a Web portal is sort of a personalized gateway or entry point to the Internet. It serves as a quick and easy method of accessing material that is tailored to an individual's interests, whether they lie in the clinical arena, in business processes, in politics, in academics, or in other areas. Through a portal, the user is able to identify exactly what he or she wants know about, and the individual's homepage is automatically populated with information on that subject as soon as it becomes available.

The goals and objectives of this program are to: (1) improve and extend the relationship between members and the College; (2) unify the various College Web sites into an integrated presence on the Internet; (3) allow the members to customize what they see when accessing the College through the Web; (4) simplify the process for members to access information; and (5) build specialized communities of the members.

Initial priorities include making it possible to access the College's Web activities by using a single login, posting a calendar of events and programs sponsored by the College and other organizations, and developing a program that will enable surgeons to conduct a federated search of both College and non-College publications. We also intend to provide online access to materials of interest to our members, assist surgeons who want to keep a portfolio of their continuing medical education activities, disseminate legislative and advocacy alerts, and conduct quick polls on relevant issues.

Subsequently, we anticipate that the Web portal will support a variety of "e-learning" programs, serve as a repository for surgeons who want to

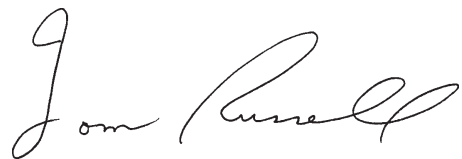
record and track their cases to support practice-based learning activities, and allow surgeons to share with patients information about their practices and outcomes. Eventually, we may well see the establishment of "virtual" communities, with electronic bulletin boards and e-mail list serves to draw like-minded surgeons together.

Enormous, cooperative undertaking

Obviously, it will take years to bring this project to complete fruition, but the seeds are already germinating. We have appointed ACS Past-President George F. Sheldon, MD, FACS, to serve as Editor-in-Chief of the project (see story, page 28) and have hired a managing editor. We will need volunteers from all of the surgical specialties to assess the types of information that will be most useful to our membership. We also will rely on the Advisory Councils for the Surgical Specialties, the College's divisions, the Communications and Information Technology staffs, the Committee on Informatics, and others to make this program work. Eventually, we will need industry support as well.

This is a very exciting project, and we are thankful to the RAS-ACS and the Committee on Young Surgeons for recommending it on behalf of the entire membership. I also would like to acknowledge the efforts of the task force that has drawn the blueprint for this project, which was headed by Richard J. Finley, MD, FACS. Linn Meyer, ACS Director of Communications, Howard Tanzman, ACS Director of Information Technology, and the Committee on Informatics also played key roles.

Stay tuned for the launch of this important and innovative program, which I believe will benefit us all.



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.