

From my perspective



As Executive Director of the American College of Surgeons, I like to periodically step back and evaluate what we are or should be doing to support our increasingly diverse membership during these changing times. As I contemplate where the College has been as an organization, where it is now, and where we need to go, I am pleased to say that I believe we are making good progress toward reaching our goals.

Many of you have shared with me your view that the competence and quality movements are placing new demands on surgeons to not only provide excellent patient care but to prove that they are doing so. As a professional organization, the College must help its members to gather and report their practice information in a timely and efficient manner. We also need to provide a full range of educational programs and more opportunities for surgeons to voice their concerns to the government and other entities that have the power to determine how we practice medicine and how we are paid.

New technology

The ongoing explosion in computer technology continues to make it possible for us to set up systems that will allow the College to become a major resource for tracking and reporting outcomes data. This information is required by the agencies, hospitals, and boards that are attempting to monitor and regulate the quality of care provided to surgical patients in this country and the competence of the professionals who provide medical services. We anticipate that our Web portal project will allow surgeons to maintain electronic case logs, continuing medical education credit documentation, and so on, in one place. Surgeons also will be able to submit all this information to their certifying boards and to government agencies through the College. This sort of technology will reduce the amount of time surgeons must devote to burdensome paperwork and increase their ability to focus on what really matters—providing care to the surgical patient.

To assist surgeons who want to communicate with their lawmakers, we also have established federal and state legislative action centers, located at <http://www.capwiz.com/facs/home/> and

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<http://www.facs.org/sslac/index.html/>, respectively. Through these Internet services, surgeons can access and send letters regarding issues of relevance to surgery with just a few clicks of the mouse. On several occasions, literally hundreds of surgeons have contacted their lawmakers via these communications vehicles, thereby helping policymakers to more clearly see how their decisions affect our ability to provide surgical care.

And, for those surgeons who want a quick reference tool, the College now offers *The Surgical Index* online at <http://www.facs.org/tsi/index.html>. This resource provides a gateway to the best of the surgical literature and is a proven time-saver in the continuing education of surgeons.

Educational programming

As surgeons strive to meet more rigorous continuing medical education credit requirements to maintain certification and to learn more about subjects that are of special interest to them, the College is expanding its educational program-

ming. Whereas our education programs in the past focused largely on clinical issues in general surgery, we are now offering a wider array of subjects at the Clinical Congress, the Spring Meeting, and other venues.

We now offer numerous skills-centered post-graduate courses that allow surgeons to have hands-on experience in the use of cutting-edge technology and the performance of new procedures. These courses often involve the use of simulators and inanimate models, so that surgeons can hone their abilities in a safe environment.

Our Resident and Associate Society and Young Surgeons Committee are presenting special sessions for medical students and residents that focus on their concerns and that will help them as they enter into practice. The July issue of the *Bulletin* featured a number of articles about these programs.

In addition, we regularly present teleconferences and workshops on coding and practice management. The practice management courses also are becoming available on CD-ROM.

Furthermore, we are providing an assortment of scholarships to support surgeons who are interested in health policy and advocacy. For example, this year we began subsidizing surgeon participation in the Leadership Program in Health Policy and Management at Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.

Advocacy

As the government attempts to remodel the nation's health care system, we are actively engaging in valuable dialogues with members of Congress and officials at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. One venture that helped to open the doors to some of these individuals' offices is the American College of Surgeons Professional Association (ACSPA) and its political action committee (PAC). Furthermore, the ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC contributed to the campaigns of three Fellows who were elected to Congress during the 2004 elections.

Our Washington Office staff is reaching out to the surgical specialty societies to develop strategies for working together to resolve the problems that affect us all. Most recently, we had a very productive discussion about the imminent

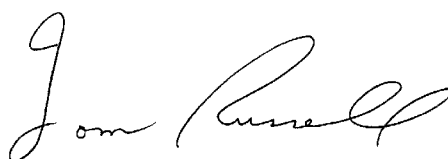
workforce crisis in emergency care.

Finally, our Divisions of Member Services and Advocacy and Health Policy combined forces once again to present the annual ACS Leadership Conference. During this program, young surgeon representatives and chapter officers learned about the health policy issues that affect surgery and had a chance to meet with their federal legislators or their staffs to advocate on behalf of the profession and the surgical patient (for coverage of the meeting, see page 35 of this issue).

We need you

I believe the College is making progress in terms of providing necessary and appropriate services to surgeons of all ages and in all specialties. We are combining technology and human creativity to build an association that all surgeons will find useful and fulfilling.

Many of these programs were initiated at your request through the Board of Governors. We need you to keep us abreast of your questions and concerns. The College is working hard to be an organization that is truly relevant to all surgeons. With your input, we are achieving this goal.



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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.