

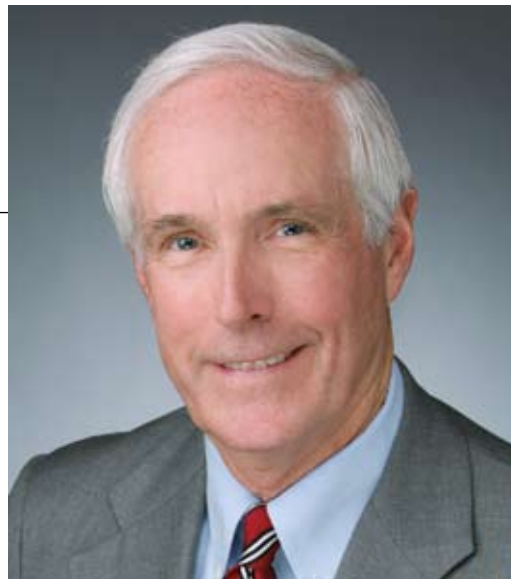
From my perspective

Members of the College and of other surgical societies frequently contact me here at our headquarters in Chicago or approach me at meetings to discuss the challenges of surgical practice in the 21st century. As you all know, the ongoing threat of payment cuts, encroachment from other health care professionals, the emergency workforce shortage, rising liability premiums and practice expenses, and other negative trends are causing many surgeons real financial and emotional pain. Indeed, these problems have precipitated so much disillusionment and dissatisfaction that some surgeons are opting to retire early or to enter into another line of work.

After hearing so many negative “war stories” from surgeons in the trenches, I found it refreshing to recently speak with a surgeon who has managed to not just to survive but to keep moving ahead during these turbulent times. Kent Kessler, MD, FACS, is a general/vascular surgeon practicing in rural Kentucky. He and his partners recognize that surgical practice today differs from what it used to be and have made adjustments not only in where and how they deliver care but also with regard to their attitudes and expectations.

I found his insights and suggestions so impressive that I wanted to write a column summarizing what he has done. Then I realized that it would be impossible for me to present his findings and recommendations any more clearly than he could, so I asked him to submit the following commentary for publication in the *Bulletin* (see pages 4-5). I anticipate that many readers will find Dr. Kessler’s strategies for diversification and growth useful in their own practices, regardless of specialty or practice location. Perhaps his concepts will encourage other surgeons to stay in practice and develop strategies of success. The time for airing our frustrations is over. Being negative does not solve problems. Change is occurring too rapidly, and as surgeons we need to start generating some positive solutions for ourselves and for the next generation of surgical professionals and their patients. We need to develop creative and better ways to practice and generate practice income.

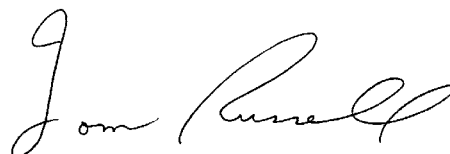
Look inward and ask yourself some tough questions: Am I communicating appropriately with



“ I anticipate that many readers will find Dr. Kessler’s strategies for diversification and growth useful in their own practices. ”

my referral base? If in solo practice, is that model working to my advantage or disadvantage? Am I competent and competitive in an ever-changing health care environment? A negative response to any of these questions may reflect that change is needed to maintain a viable, pleasant, and economically stable practice.

I have heard from many surgeons who engaged in similar exercises. Dr. Kessler is just one example from whom we can all learn.



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.