

From my perspective

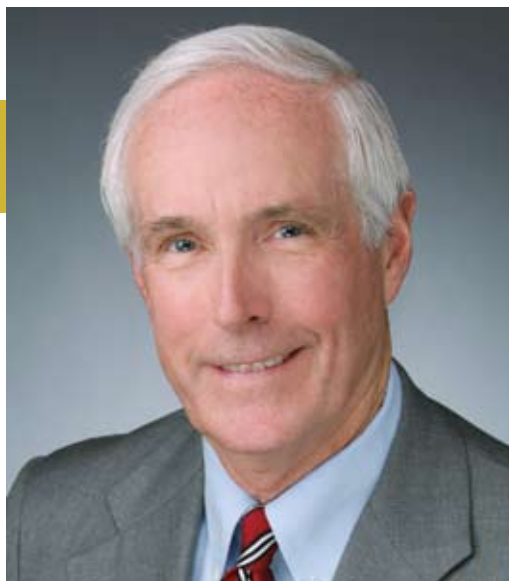
Last year at this time, the American College of Surgeons Board of Regents approved a proposal to launch a major initiative aimed at improving this organization's visibility and, thus, its influence in the public arena. The primary goal of this program is to build a deeper understanding and recognition of the value and relevance of the College among high-level health policymakers, the news media, and leading health care consumers and advocates so that it can be a major player in attempting to create a more positive climate for practicing surgeons and their patients. We believe that by enhancing and broadening the College's credibility, it will have a greater voice in medical, health care, and policy decisions and can more effectively work to bring about positive change for its members and the surgical profession as a whole.

The College's Public Profile and Communications Steering Committee—chaired by ACS First Vice-President-Elect and former Regent Jack W. McAninch, MD, FACS—has been leading this effort with the assistance of Weber Shandwick Worldwide, a well-respected international communications management firm. The ACS Director of Communications, Linn Meyer, is the staff coordinator for this project and interacts closely with our account executive at Weber Shandwick Health Care.

Media relations

The College has long had a very active and effective media relations program, and staff members are in regular contact with reporters representing the consumer press, both print and electronic, and the trade press. Our working relationship with Weber Shandwick is allowing us to significantly augment our media relations efforts with top-tier media outlets throughout the country, including major broadcast media. For example, in recent months, several members of the College's leadership were interviewed and quoted in major news stories on trauma care and various public health issues that were featured in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, and ACS President Gerald B. Healy, MD, FACS, was featured in an *NBC Nightly News* segment on the need for effective trauma systems.

The College's Project New Orleans, which was



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organized by the Operation Giving Back staff and took place during the 2007 Clinical Congress, received excellent media attention. The purpose of the project was to enlist the aid of surgeons in attendance at the meeting to do demolition work in preparation for a new medical clinic that will be built in the economically depressed Bywater neighborhood of New Orleans' 9th Ward. During this project, 180 surgeons volunteered their time and effort for this purpose, and the activity was captured by five local television stations and by *USA Today* in a major feature story. (For more information, see the detailed feature about the project and the media coverage in the January *Bulletin*, page 32.)

Future top-tier media relations efforts will concentrate on using important current topics as a platform for news stories that will highlight the surgeon's role in medical innovation and showcase our skills, expertise, and life-saving abilities. We anticipate that these high-level efforts

will help to soften some of the public's negative perceptions of surgeons.

Patient advocacy

If the College is to continue to maintain its credibility as a patient advocate, we simply cannot state that "the College has no position" on the complex and difficult issues facing surgeons, their patients, and society as a whole today. Hence, the Public Profile and Communications Steering Committee is appointing a Subcommittee on Issues that will function as a clearinghouse on subjects the College needs to address through informal or official comments or policy statements.

The subcommittee will work with various ACS committees and the advisory councils to pinpoint matters of concern to surgeons and their patients now or in the immediate future. The subcommittee will then provide that information to the steering committee, along with recommended positions for the College to take and suggestions as to whether those stances should be expressed in the form of comments or official policy statements.

The work of this subcommittee will be an essential underpinning in helping to raise its credibility and visibility in these complex and challenging times.

Partnering for public visibility

Another area in which we are actively engaged is building relationships with leading health care consumer and patient advocate groups. We believe such partnerships are of paramount importance to the future viability of the American College of Surgeons and the surgical profession. A predominant focus of the visibility campaign will be to have a dialogue with other organizations about possible collaboration on projects addressing trauma readiness, patient education, and public health issues.

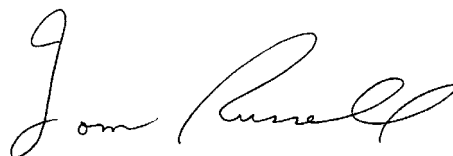
In addition, we are seeking to increase our presence at medical forums. For example, we recently met with a representative of the World Health Care Congress about the College's possible participation in its upcoming annual meeting.

Attracting and retaining members

Finally, we are working to spread the message within the surgical community that the American College of Surgeons is vigorously advocating on Capitol Hill and at the state level for our members

and their patients. We particularly want surgeons in all specialties to realize the value of ACS membership with respect to representing the surgical profession with one voice in the policymaking process. In addition, we are actively getting the word out about the robust tools and resources the College is providing its members to assist them in fulfilling Maintenance of Certification requirements and to help them to continue to provide optimal patient care in today's politically charged, complex, and challenging environment.

In short, I am very pleased with the progress the College has made with respect to increasing the organization's public profile and visibility. I believe that this initiative will go a long way toward helping to build a deeper understanding and recognition of the value and relevance of the American College of Surgeons so that ultimately it will have a greater voice in medical, health care, and policy decision making and a role in influencing policy outcomes.



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.