The Board of Governors’
Awards Program

November 12, 2020 | 7:00 PM CST

facs.org/BOGAwards
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Ronald J. Weigel, MD, PhD, FACS
Chair, Board of Governors

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Girma Tefera, MD, FACS
Medical Director, Operation Giving Back

David C. Williams, MD, MSc, FACS, FRCSC
Chair, Board of Governors Surgical Volunteerism & Humanitarianism Awards Workgroup

Recognition of Chapters
Mark A. Dobbertien, DO, FACS
Member Services Pillar Lead, Board of Governors

Recognition of Retiring Governors
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Chair, Board of Governors

Patricia L. Turner, MD, MBA, FACS
Director, ACS Division of Member Services

David J. Welsh, MD, MBA, FACS
Member, Governors Alumni Program

ACS Chapters and Specialty Societies
Represented on the Board of Governors

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Ronald J. Weigel, MD, PhD, FACS
Chair, Board of Governors

Patricia L. Turner, MD, MBA, FACS
Director, ACS Division of Member Services

ACS Chapters and Specialty Societies
Represented on the Board of Governors

Closing
Ronald J. Weigel, MD, PhD, FACS
Chair, Board of Governors
2020 ACS/Pfizer Surgical Volunteerism Award Presentation

The ACS/Pfizer Surgical Volunteerism Award recognizes ACS Fellows and members who are committed to giving back to society through significant contributions to surgical care as volunteers. This year, three awards will be granted.
Robert Riviello, MD, MPH, FACS
International Award

Dr. Riviello, a trauma, burn, and acute care surgeon in Boston, MA, received an International Surgical Volunteerism Award for his work to improve access to medical care for populations in sub-Saharan Africa.

Dr. Riviello, a surgeon at Brigham and Women’s Hospital (BWH) in Boston and associate professor of surgery and global health and social medicine at Harvard Medical School (HMS), has been involved in global health and surgery care beginning early in his career. While completing his training at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN, he was mentored by John Tarpley, MD, FACS, FWACS, a well-known name in international surgical volunteerism and the 2006 recipient of the ACS/Pfizer Surgical Volunteerism Award. In Dr. Riviello’s first year of practice in 2007, he was selected as a Fulbright International Fellow in Global Surgery at Centro Evangelico de Medicina in Lubango, Angola. There, he worked under Steve Foster, MD, FRCSC, a Canadian surgeon with years of experience in global surgical volunteerism and an awardee of the Canadian Royal College Teasdale-Corti Humanitarian Award, helping to open the hospital and provide broad-based general surgery.

After joining BWH, Dr. Riviello joined the Center for Surgery and Public Health (CSPH) and the newly formed HMS Program in Global Surgery and Social Change (PGSSC); volunteering his time and efforts through these organizations provided the platform for his engagement in global health.

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Since then, Dr. Riviello has dedicated his career to improving surgical access and quality for vulnerable people, splitting his time over the last decade between BWH and sub-Saharan Africa, strengthening surgical services, surgical training programs, nontechnical skills for surgery, and providing mentorship to the CSPH’s and PGSSC’s global surgery fellows.

Dr. Riviello was introduced to Rwanda through Partners In Health (PIH), a nongovernmental organization committed to social justice and health care for the underserved. He has since worked in Rwanda with PIH; the Rwanda Surgical Society; the University of Rwanda (UR), Kigali; and, most recently, the University of Global Health Equity, where he was selected to be the inaugural chair of global surgery. From 2011 to 2018, Dr. Riviello co-directed Harvard’s engagement in the Rwanda Human Resources for Health Program, an initiative of the Rwandan Ministry of Health meant to train health practitioners and scale-up health care providers in the country. These collaborative efforts revitalized training programs in general surgery, anesthesiology, and gynecology, as well as supported the launch of new UR training programs in orthopaedics, urology, neurosurgery, and plastic surgery. Dr. Riviello also served as a faculty surgeon at the University Training Hospital in Kigali, Rwanda; associate to the head of department of surgery of UR; and liaison to the PIH-Rwanda for surgery.

Dr. Riviello’s scholarly interests have the consistent goal of collaboratively improving quality of and access to surgical care of impoverished people and communities. In partnership with PIH-Rwanda, through the PGSSC, he has studied the home-based follow-up of caesarean section patients in rural Rwanda by supporting community health workers with mobile health applications. Working with CSPH and RSS, he developed contextualized training in nontechnical skills for surgery to improve the quality of operating room (OR) team performance.
Arthur L. Trask, MD, FACS
International Award

Dr. Trask, a retired general surgeon in Springfield, MO, received an International Surgical Volunteerism Award for his 30 years of service providing essential surgical care for the population of Haiti.

Pignon, a rural town in the mountain area of central Haiti eight hours by road from Port-au-Prince, became the epicenter of his surgical volunteerism efforts after visiting with Inova Fairfax Hospital colleagues in 1990. Since then, Dr. Trask has continued to lead a surgical team to Haiti yearly or biannually, depending on local factors, to serve and improve the quality of care for the population. Visits last 10 to 14 days, with clinic and OR time under the instruction and coordination of Dr. Trask and his cohort of surgical contacts.

Dr. Trask began his surgical volunteerism work by providing surgical and clinical services, but he found that needs could be better served by designing an educational service coupled with existing efforts. He recruited experienced nurses to help establish a local nursing school so the Haitian people eventually could provide care to their own. Lectures and practical demonstrations were built into his service by inviting U.S. specialists to speak with the Haitian staff about topics including nutrition, burn care, and injury prevention. Trainees are instructed on the use of equipment, such as ventilators and laparoscopic equipment.

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Dr. Trask and Guy Theodore, MD, FACS, 2008 ACS/Pfizer Surgical Humanitarian Award recipient, partnered with the university program in Port-au-Prince to establish Pignon as a location for resident education, ensuring the population year-round surgical expertise. He has sponsored several surgeons for additional specialty training in trauma, surgical critical care, and thoracic surgery in the U.S.

After the earthquake of 2010, Dr. Trask recognized a need for disaster preparedness and supplies in Pignon, assisting in the construction of a warehouse to hold dry goods and nonperishable supplies. Dr. Trask continued his disaster relief surgical volunteerism efforts in Jacmel, a coastal town that was affected by the earthquake, through the establishment of a hospital by the Community Coalition for Haiti, founded by Dr. Trask’s team and a Baptist church in Vienna, VA. The clinic houses multiple, fully functional ORs that serve patients throughout the region.

Dr. Trask’s collaboration with the INOVA Corporation has led to a lasting partnership, now more than 20 years old, that funds and supplies the hospital in Jacmel, as well as the surgeons on multiple rotations of subspecialties, including orthopaedics, ophthalmology, surgical oncology, and hernia repair.

To increase sustainability and lessen the environmental footprint of hospital supplies, Dr. Trask established the medical waste reduction system for the Hospital de Beneficience in Pignon by installing an incinerator on the grounds of the hospital for biological and surgical supply waste. This effort has significantly decreased the pollution of the town and the surrounding area. The electrical and generator system assures the operating suite of power for sterilization, air conditioning, and lighting.

Dr. Trask works through faith-based fundraising systems and through surgical corporations to obtain both equipment and funding, and several organizations now collect supplies and medications on a regular basis to equip the surgical teams in Pignon and Jacmel.
Aaron Epstein, MD
Resident Award

Dr. Epstein, a general surgery resident at the University at Buffalo, NY, received a Resident Volunteerism Award for his work as founder and president of the not-for-profit medical humanitarian organization, Global Surgical and Medical Support Group (GSMSG).

In the course of receiving a graduate degree in intelligence and security studies from Georgetown University Walsh School of Foreign Service, Washington, DC, and spending time training in Beirut, Lebanon, Dr. Epstein saw the health care struggles facing conflict-displaced refugees and civilians in combat zones in the Middle East. He returned to Georgetown University to attend the School of Medicine so that he could use his expertise in both medicine and regional security to work with regional governments to provide aid to these populations. Dr. Epstein founded the GSMSG in 2015, while still a medical student.

Dr. Epstein personally has led more than a dozen deployments of medical and surgical teams of up to 50 professionals to Iraq, where they treated victims of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the civil war in Syria. Since 2015, GSMSG teams in Iraq have completed hundreds of major operations, as well as tended to thousands of patients who have come from as far west as Damascus to the Iranian border to the east. In a single deployment in 2016, the GSMSG surgical team provided more major operations than nearly all major foreign governments in Kurdish territory that year.

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The initial goal of the GSMSG was to bring top-tier physicians and medical professionals to the Middle East to provide direct medical/surgical care in conflict zones, but Dr. Epstein saw the importance of capacity-building through the training of local physicians, surgeons, nurses, and paramedics as a necessary step to creating long-lasting benefits for the local populations. Since the group’s founding, GSMSG training programs have taught more than 2,000 local medics and more than 200 local nurses, and staff have led training sessions attended by more than 500 local physicians and surgeons. Dr. Epstein also works to include women medical and surgical providers in the training to provide opportunities for this group that historically has been without a presence in local health care.

Domestically, Dr. Epstein has directed the GSMSG’s response to hurricanes and a recent deployment to New York, NY, to help staff at the Ryan Larkin Field Hospital set up in Manhattan from the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis through the height of the pandemic. GSMSG team members have responded to the COVID-19 crisis elsewhere in the U.S., as well as internationally, including helping to staff an improvised intensive care unit for patients in the St. Martin Islands. Dr. Epstein’s efforts with GSMSG, in conjunction with HHI Corporation, have also enabled the deployment of a multi-tractor trailer triage unit to Jackson Memorial Hospital, Miami, to assist in managing the caseload in South Florida.

Since the founding of GSMSG, Dr. Epstein has continued to expand its network of professionals to include more than 300 physicians and more than 900 medics, paramedics, nurses, physician assistants, and certified registered nurse anesthetists. To date, GSMSG has collected more than $2.4 million worth of medical and surgical supplies for donation to medical centers in northern Iraq and provided more than $4.1 million in medical and surgical education to foreign partners. At present, Dr. Epstein is a tenured U.S. State Department Fulbright Specialist in Global Healthcare Development (2017-2021) and is working to expand the areas of coverage to include locations in Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia.
Operation Giving Back (OGB) was created under the leadership of Andrew L. Warshaw, MD, FACS, and Robert V. Stephens, MD, FACS, in 2004 with the intention to serve as a comprehensive resource center to equip and engage surgeons in surgical volunteerism and humanitarianism efforts. OGB is currently under the leadership of Girma Tefera, MD, FACS, Medical Director.

The mission of Operation Giving Back is to leverage the passion, skills, and humanitarian ethos of the surgical community to effectively meet the needs of the medically underserved. We provide the necessary tools to facilitate humanitarian outreach among surgeons of all specialties, at all stages of the profession, and with emphasis on both domestic and international service. By delivering information on opportunities to volunteer through patient care, education, training, systems strengthening, advocacy efforts, and donation of needed equipment and supplies, OGB focuses these resources to address critical public health issues as they relate to the provision of safe, timely, necessary surgical care around the globe.

As a central feature of the program, the OGB website was created to provide a dynamic hub of information, resources, and networks for those interested in addressing the unmet surgical needs of the underserved around the globe.

Through a network of high impact partner organizations, OGB directs surgeons to volunteer opportunities that align with their skills, passions, and beliefs. OGB cultivates innovative models and multisector collaborations with academic institutions, corporations, foundations, government and non-profit entities in order to inform public policy, create sustainable avenues of knowledge transfer, and diminish global disparities while lessening the burden of surgical disease.

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