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FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Service to Patients and Professionalism: An Important Reaffirmation

No Physician insofar as he is a physician, considers his own good in what he prescribes, but the good of his patient...

Plato (427-347 BC), *The Republic*

The baton has been passed. I assume the presidency of the North American Spine Society (NASS) after a remarkably successful annual meeting (a record-breaking 2300 participants, 105 papers, 5 major symposia, 6 hands-on courses and much more) in spite of the recent atrocities of September 11th. I follow on the heels of Dr. Volker Sonntag's strong leadership and on the shoulders of those preceding him. Now, rather than be ignored by the Agency for Healthcare Policy and Research, NASS is invited by the federal government to help plan future projects. Our voice is also heard in Washington, DC as an advocate for patient rights and reasonable health care reform. Our commitment to further spine care through research remains a cornerstone of our society reflected in the scholarly basic science and clinical papers presented each year. The NASS Research Fund tops \$1.2 million supporting numerous research projects and *The Spine Journal* now serves as the official publication of our organization. We are proactive leaders in patient safety issues, and we are continually improving our members' and our patients' educational resources. NASS is doing so well that if I'm not careful, people may think I know what I'm doing.

At first blush, the chance that NASS would rise to such prominence seems unlikely. Before the birth of NASS in 1985, there were already many academic and professional academies and societies that served the operative and nonoperative spine practitioner. However, the robust growth of NASS (we just inducted our

3000th member) clearly demonstrates that the diagnosis and treatment of spinal disorders is complex and represents unique challenges best served by an organization with a single focus. Yet, that single focus on the spine has attracted the diverse membership of NASS, validating the fact that the best way to treat these patients is through multidisciplinary care. Through the continuum of care that encompasses the management of most spinal problems, the patient is best served by a team of providers with a common purpose—maximizing function while limiting suffering. NASS fundamentally exists for this reason. Everything that NASS does has one ultimate goal for its membership: it helps us to provide the best care for our patients.

This is not a new concept for us. Our members have always demonstrated remarkable concern for the spine patient's welfare. Many have volunteered their services for international medical missions. Others have been politically active, both locally and nationally. Our members contribute to better patient care through quality research and educational endeavors and, perhaps most importantly, through our day-to-day practices, focusing on one person at a time. Never more dramatically has the NASS member's unwavering commitment to the patient been demonstrated than during the immediate aftermath of the heinous terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11th. Within 24 hours of informing our membership that NASS would cover travel costs for those who wished to help provide medical care for the disaster victims, 150 of our members vol-

unteered, some from as far away as Brazil and Chile. In many cases, the services of entire trauma teams were offered.

In the coming year, NASS remains committed to helping members provide the best care for their patients. Through the generosity of our membership's service to our society combined with our capable and forward-thinking staff, NASS is poised to thrive on many fronts. I am hopeful that we will expand further educational resources and materials for our patients and for our members. Collaboration with other organizations (Japanese Spine Research Society, Brazilian Spine Society, Sociedad IberoLatinoAmericana de Columna, World Spine II and others) has further enhanced the value and reputation of NASS, and we will continue and expand these efforts.

Look for continuing support for research and listen for even more vociferous advocacy. Also, of course we will continue the important work regarding proper cod-

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ing and reimbursement, yet we will not have the scope of NASS defined by such operational issues. If we remember the commitment that we must have to the health of our patients and our duty to society, little can derail us.

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distractions, we must now more than ever reaffirm our professionalism. We must value performance and service to the patient over personal reward of any type. Such a reaffirmation is important and timely for me personally, as this will be the guiding principle of my presidency. I look forward to the upcoming year and am grateful for the opportunity to serve.