



Jean-Jacques Abitbol, MD
The California Spine Group
San Diego, CA

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Looking Back

As I look back on the last year and prepare to pass the presidential torch over to Dr. Joel Press, I am immensely proud of what NASS has accomplished and the course we have set for the future. We celebrated our 20th anniversary in 2005, a year filled with great growth marked by the induction of our 4,000th member, plans for a new high-tech learning center, increased patient education, amplified advocacy initiatives and new philanthropic efforts abroad. I'd like to highlight a few of those accomplishments and acknowledge the efforts of the many individuals who contributed to our great year.

One of our most ambitious efforts ever began last year with development of the new NASS Spine Master's Institute. Construction is underway on this cutting-edge facility which will bring spine education to a whole new level. We are creating state-of-the-art laboratories for hands-on courses and technique workshops, live Web-casting capability and an in-house media center. This revolutionary spine center will be located just west of Chicago in Burr Ridge, IL and is slated to be ready in 2006 as part of the new NASS headquarters.

NASS is in the top 7% of all continuing medical education providers to be accredited "with commendation" from the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education. This new learning center will build on the success of our well-respected education program, enhance CME opportunities to our members and expand offerings to more spine care providers.

We have raised considerable funds for this capital campaign from numerous donors. I would like to acknowledge support from Medtronic Sofamor Danek, Stryker and Zimmer who have each committed \$1 million to help fund the multi-million-dollar project.

In the past year, we have increased media and public relations activities which have been key in disseminating information about spine care and industry issues, advocacy efforts and reimbursement issues. We expanded our public outreach by partnering with other medical societies such as the ThinkFirst Foundation and through our annual Spine Health public education campaign. These strategies have helped NASS secure a position as the experts in the spine care field.

Our direct outreach to agencies helped preserve reimbursement for spine codes in CMS' mandated five-year review of relative value units (RVUs). We were successful in this important effort because of the work of Dr. Charles Mick and Dr. Greg Przybylski who worked tirelessly to gather data and submit recommendations to the Relative Value Update Committee (RUC). In addition, Dr. Mick was elected to a two-year RUC term, a well-deserved honor for him and point of pride for NASS.

We tackled an ambitious legislative agenda in 2005, including a looming Congressional proposal to convert the current Medicare physician payment system to a pay for performance system. We have worked to support measures to avert physician payment cuts in the short run and put into place a fair system that better reflects the cost of practicing medicine.

As the spine care discipline and the broader health care environment evolve, we are constantly mindful that we must be vigilant in examining and anticipating ethical concerns—this year was no exception. We expanded our Code of Ethics to cover providers' relationships with industry. Our intent, as former NASS President Stan Herring stated in the last issue of *SpineLine*, is "that ethical self-governance on the part of spine professionals

One of our most ambitious efforts ever began last year with development of the new NASS Spine Master's Institute... This new learning center will build on the success of our well-respected education program, enhance CME opportunities to our members and expand offerings to more spine care providers.

will promote an environment in which we attain the highest academic standards and highest quality care for our patients." Our thanks to the Professional Conduct and Ethics Committee under the leadership of Drs. Howard Morgan and Stan Herring. The committee is now finalizing a section on Ethics Related to Research.

We also created the Leadership Committee, comprised of physicians and industry representatives, to proactively predict and address potential concerns in the spine industry. Out of that committee came recommendations for two new interest groups on issues concerning motion preservation and spine biologics. I'm pleased to report that the NASS Board voted to explore possibilities for creating new sections or perhaps societies under the NASS umbrella. Special thanks to the new Leadership Committee: Joel Press, MD; Thomas Errico, MD; John Kostuik, MD; David Fardon, MD; Richard Guyer, MD; David Wong, MD; Stanley Herring, MD; Nancy H. Holmes, RN; Terry Schlotterback; Dennis Stripe; Brad Coates; Marshall Perez; William Christianson; and Eric Muehlbauer, MJ, CAE.

Beyond issues on the home front, NASS made an important impact abroad as well. In June 2005, the SCRUBBs team, including volunteers Andrew Moulton, MD and Keri George, RN, returned to Malawi, Africa to follow up with patients from a previous trip and to take on new cases.

Of course, the tremendous growth and ambitious attitude of NASS is steeped in our 20-year history and built upon the accomplishments of our predecessors. The horizon for 2006 and beyond will continue to be advocacy in every sense of the word. We will need to find ways to expand and build NASS' advocacy efforts in the areas of political activity, legal issues, ethics, public opinion, value of care and economic impact...

SCRUBBs is committed to providing hope, health and happiness to the children of Malawi by making multiple future trips to the CURE hospital so that it may some day become a self-sufficient spine center for the entire country.

The World Spine III meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in late July 2005, was a huge success, garnering more registrations than anticipated. This meeting has proven that the World Spine Society has received and will continue to garner a supportive following as it demonstrates its commitment to providing high-quality, scientific education for the entire world. Special thanks to those who worked so hard to make it a success including: Ed Benzel, Luis Pimenta, Marcos Masini, Kathy Baker, Robert Gunzburg, Rick Guyer, Jeff Wang and Luis Vialle.

Of course, the tremendous growth and ambitious attitude of NASS is steeped in our 20-year history and built upon the accomplishments of our predecessors. The horizon for 2006 and beyond will continue to be advocacy in every sense of the word. We will need to find ways to expand and build NASS' advocacy efforts in the areas of political activity, legal issues, ethics, public opinion, value of care and economic impact so that twenty years from now, our successors will look back on us with the same pride and respect we have for our predecessors.

It has truly been an honor and a privilege to serve this great organization and the members as the President of the North American Spine Society.