

tration at Harvard Business School and author of *Who Killed American Health-care?*, “physicians are increasingly forced to become salaried employees of hospitals and insurers and are constrained by recipes for the practice of medicine that are cooked up by government and insurance company bureaucrats. The cycle is bringing about the imminent collapse of the medical profession—which gravely endangers our health care system.”

Recognizing these serious issues, NASS leadership has realized that we must adjust our course. With a gift from me to the Board of Jim Collins’ book, *Good to Great*, to inspire us, we set out to determine how NASS can become “great.” This exercise forced us to look introspectively at all that NASS does and does not do. It is critical now more than ever that we focus our resources and examine what and who NASS is. Our revised mission statement reflects these changes:

NASS is a multidisciplinary medical organization dedicated to fostering the highest quality, evidence-based, and ethical spine care by promoting education, research and advocacy.

Our vision is clear: we want to foster quality spine care for our patients. This encompasses educating and giving our membership the tools to become the best possible physicians. This does not mean that we ignore the socioeconomic issues of patient care but rather become more involved to assure these patient oriented goals.

This new mission and vision is such an important issue that I am proud to announce the formation of a new Quality Spine Care Committee that will guide us in achieving our goals whether through data/outcome collection, training, registries, strategic collaborations or possibly physician endorsement.

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We must strive to protect our profession. Government and insurance company pressures must not alter our professionalism or patient relationships.

We have continued to push forward in protecting physician reimbursement and have continued our work with CMS for fusion validation by formalizing the Combined Professional Societies Task Force on Lumbar Fusion with the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, American Association of Neurological Surgeons, Congress of Neurological Surgeons and the Scoliosis Research Society. (See “Spine Community Urges Changes to CMS Draft Assessment of Lumbar Fusion,” May/June *SpineLine*, 2007;8(3):26-27). Such collaboration is important. We have also recently met with the leadership of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons and realize we have more synergies than differences. In fact, we have discussed a multisociety outcomes project, the Quality Spine Care Forum, funded by unrestricted grants from industry and, yes, possibly even the insurance industry. We all have common interests that will evaporate if we don’t take action now.

In that vein, strange as it may seem, we have met with United Health Care and Blue Cross Blue Shield to discuss how they may help us gather meaningful outcome data. As I told you in my previous *SpineLine* messages, we have looked at

many alternatives. Working with insurance companies was the furthest thing from my mind, but we realized that their issues are the same as ours. They are willing to pay for quality medicine but they have no way of measuring this except for their “administrative data” that they collect on all of us. They are interested in registries and developing meaningful outcome data. While we all feel abused by the insurance industry, in this area, their interests clearly coincide with ours and our patients. They may seem to be strange bedfellows, but the times are different and we are moving forward in this effort.

Having been a part of NASS from the beginning (I’ve missed only one annual meeting), I feel like a proud father looking at how NASS has grown up over the last 22 years. I have truly enjoyed leading NASS this past year and have been honored with your support. Of course, the outlook is very bright for NASS with one of the finest Boards of Directors and upcoming Presidential lines. As with any vibrant society, we must continue to be nimble on our feet, re-evaluate, and readjust our course to maintain our wonderful profession. I feel the changes that have taken place this year will ensure our continued success.