



Ray M. Baker, MD
 Washington Interventional Spine
 Associates
 Bellevue, WA

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Leveraging 25 Years of Fostering Quality Spine Care

I am privileged to preside over the North American Spine Society during this milestone year. In preparing to take the helm from Charlie Branch, I found myself reflecting over our quarter century history and looking forward to our future. In 1984, the handful of participants at the North American Spine Association's (NASA's) first meeting in Vail could not have envisioned the changes that would occur in spine care. Interestingly, however, that meeting's agenda could still be used as a meeting template today—topics included conservative care, laminectomy, fusion, injections, internal fixation and anterior fusion. Indeed, held in a 30 x 30 foot auditorium, the Vail meeting was the seed that would grow into today's NASS, a thriving, vibrant organization that just held its 24th Annual Meeting in San Francisco with over 4,000 attendees, including participants from 53 countries.

As I read over the various accounts of NASS' early days, I was struck by the founding members' spirit of cooperation and dedication to education, research and multidisciplinary care. From the beginning, there were challenges and fundamental disagreements. Should the society be surgical? Should it focus on the lumbar spine? Should spinal trauma and scoliosis be included? And yet, the leadership of both the North American Lumbar Spine Association and the American College of Spine Surgeons came together at Laguna Niguel, CA with a spirit of compromise, and the North American Spine Society was born on July 24, 1985.

Given our rich heritage of diversity, it is fitting that an anesthesiologist and interventional pain physician would be given the privilege of leading NASS during this landmark year. I am proud to have the opportunity to fill that role, and I feel the

weight of the responsibility I have been given. Certainly, challenges and fundamental disagreements continue. Yet, our multidisciplinary history and our ability to unite around core values represent our greatest strength. Over the years, the adversity we have faced together has taught us valuable lessons in compromise and has built our mutual respect and understanding. We have grown stronger.

Indeed, our membership statistics reflect this strength. Despite the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, despite the challenges of impending health care reform, and despite pressures for greater transparency and for a renewed sense of professionalism, we continue to grow and evolve. Our membership is up by over 700 this year. We are on pace to have over 6,000 members by our 25th annual meeting next year. Importantly, our member retention rate is an outstanding 97%! In short, we are thriving.

But we are not resting on our laurels. To maintain our strength and to prepare for upcoming challenges, NASS has recently undergone a quiet but dramatic transformation into a more nimble and responsive society. To cite just a few examples:

- Over the past two years, we completely remodeled our board, committee and administrative structures to enable greater communication up and down the chain of command. This included a refinement of our mission statements and core operating principles to be in line with our long-term strategic plans.
- Last year, we undertook a major effort to build and strengthen bridges between spine's stakeholder societies. This has already borne fruit as NASS took a

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leading role, along with AANS/CNS and AAOS, in responding to the Washington State Health Technology Assessment Committee's review of fusion and total disc arthroplasty. NASS also recently coordinated the efforts of 12 stakeholder societies in submitting a joint statement in defense of facet joint interventions. Perhaps most importantly, we held a landmark Spine Summit at NASS headquarters this year that included the leadership of 11 different spine care related societies. Several key consensus areas were developed, and we committed to strengthen our alliance and amplify our collective efforts.

- Our emphasis on ethics and professionalism originated more than 10 years ago. In the past year, these efforts reached a strong, new and forward-looking stance that positions NASS as one of the field's most credible advocates for patients and members:

- The NASS Board of Directors has mandated the strictest standards of divestiture of any medical society. Throughout this transition, we have retained all of our existing board members—an outstanding achievement given the depth of talent, experience and leadership represented. I personally thank and congratulate all of them for their strength of character and vision. The policies enacted will reduce the chance of a perceived or real conflict of interest at the board level and will increase NASS' credibility as we advocate for our members and patients in the future.

- We implemented a policy of transparency and rigorous disclosure for all authors or speakers at our annual meeting and other CME events. I am proud to say that out of 2,500 authors and speakers at the recent annual meeting in San Francisco, only eight e-posters had to be excluded due to a lack of disclosure.

- We completed a major building

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project that included consolidation and expansion of the NASS headquarters and the building of the Spine Education Research Center (SERC). This state of the art facility promotes quality spine care by allowing NASS to host meetings and conferences and by extending our educational initiatives with cutting edge multimedia and teleconferencing capabilities.

So, with the experience gained over the past 25 years and with the recent top-to-bottom transformation of our infrastructure, how is NASS going to leverage its strength over the coming year? Along with continuing the projects outlined above, NASS is committed to two major objectives: understanding value in spine care and collecting the data necessary to prove that value through the development of an outcomes registry. Understanding value first requires defining it in meaningful and measurable ways. Last year, we created a Value Task Force. Over the coming months, this task force, along with an outside consultant, will continue to outline value measures while dovetailing these efforts with the NASS outcomes registry effort. Parallel to the Value Task Force, NASS created a Registry Committee which has been diligently working over the past year and has recently chosen a consultant to guide the process. The goal is to have a working registry pilot running by our 25th annual meeting in October.

The Value and Registry projects are bold in their scope and timelines, but the imminent threats to spine care professionals require bold and immediate action. NASS is perfectly positioned to take a leadership role in these discussions. From its early formation as a multidisciplinary

spine society to recent, decisive steps to promote professionalism and through side-by-side defense of our members in pedicle screw litigation to building strategic alliances with stakeholder societies, NASS has a proud history of leadership on which to build. As spine care professionals, you expect nothing less than the best from NASS. We are gratified by your continued support and welcome the opportunity to continue to serve you into the next quarter century.



This article is dedicated to Dr. Vert Mooney (above) who passed on October 13, 2009. Dr. Mooney was a founding member of NASS and served as NASS President from 1987-1988. During his tenure, he was instrumental in advancing nonsurgical education. He was an undisputed leader in orthopedic research for over 40 years and will be deeply missed.