NASS Announces 2018 Recognition Award Winners

LOS ANGELES—During its 33rd Annual Meeting, the North American Spine Society (NASS) announced the winners of its prestigious 2018 Recognition Awards.

Honorees are nominated by their peers for their outstanding contributions to NASS and the field of spine care. Three of the awards are named in honor of founding members of NASS who made significant contributions to the early success of the organization. Another recognizes an advocate who contributes to federal advocacy efforts on behalf of patients and members of the society.

- Leon Wiltse Award: Sohail K. Mirza, MD, MPH
- Henry Farfan Award: Jeffrey C. Lotz, PhD
- David Selby Award: Jerome Schofferman, MD
- Past President Award: Jean-Jacques Abitbol, MD
- Spine Advocacy Award: John G. Finkenberg, MD

2018 Leon Wiltse Award: Sohail K. Mirza, MD, MPH

To recognize excellence in leadership and/or clinical research in spine care.

Nominated by Charles Reitman, MD

Sohail Mirza, MD, MPH, is a nationally-known orthopedic surgeon who specializes in diseases, cancers, and injuries in adults and children. He has worked extensively with the spine community to advocate for measurement of surgical complications and patient-reported outcomes. In addition to his clinical work, he also is an active researcher, studying treatments for spinal trauma and cervical spine malformations, as well as safety and outcomes data for spine surgeries. Dr. Mirza held an endowed chair in spine research at the University of Washington before being recruited as Chair of the Department of Orthopaedics at Dartmouth in 2008. Over the past 10 years, he led the transformation of the orthopedics department to team-based care, consistent use of standardized coordinated care paths, and systematic tracking of patient-reported outcomes in the electronic health record, while significantly reducing direct cost of care and improving patient satisfaction scores. He also helped establish the Dartmouth Center for Surgical Innovation (CSI)—a $20M research facility and associated enterprise to promote and enable technology development and innovations across surgical specialties. In 2018, Dr. Mirza transitioned to the private sector and founded PEER (Patient Experience and End Results) Clinic for Back Pain and Spine Surgery in Fairfax, Virginia. PEER Clinic is modeled on using patient-reported outcomes for clinical care decisions.

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2018 Henry Farfan Award: Jeffrey C. Lotz, PhD
To recognize outstanding contributions in spine-related basic science research.
Nominated by Michael Heggeness, MD, PhD, and Conor O’Neill, MD

Jeffrey Lotz, PhD is the David S. Bradford MD Endowed Chair in Orthopaedic Surgery and Vice Chair of Research at University of California San Francisco (UCSF). He has been the Director of the Orthopaedic Bioengineering Laboratory since 1992, and is the founding director of three centers at UCSF: NIH-funded Core Center for Musculoskeletal Biology in Medicine (CCMBM); the NSF-funded Industry/University Cooperative Research Center (CDMI), and the recently formed NIDCR-funded Center for Dental, Oral and Craniofacial Tissue and Organ Regeneration (C-DOCTOR). Dr. Lotz is a recognized national authority in biomechanics with special expertise in spine biomechanics, intervertebral disc biology, and tissue engineering. He has contributed to our understanding of disc biology through laboratory work focusing on identifying mechanisms of disc degeneration, developing novel diagnostics and therapies for low back pain, and the biomechanics of spinal instrumentation. He is an outstanding educator and student of the spine. Dr. Lotz earned a doctorate degree in Medical Engineering from the Harvard/MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology, a Masters Degree in Mechanical Engineering Design from Stanford University, and Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from UC Berkeley.

2018 David Selby Award: Jerome Schofferman, MD
To recognize contributions to the art and science of spinal disorder management through service to NASS.
Nominated by Charles Reitman, MD, and F. Todd Wetzel, MD

Jerome Schofferman, MD trained in internal medicine at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center and remained on the faculty at UCLA and then UCSF for many years. After moving to San Francisco, he became the medical director of Hospice of San Francisco and help found the first AIDS Hospice. He developed an interest in pain medicine and began working with spine pain in the early 1980s. He is certified by both the American Board of Internal Medicine and American Board of Pain Medicine, and served as a member of the Board of Directors of the American Academy of Pain Medicine. He has been a member of NASS since 1988. As a NASS member, among other appointments, he has served as Chair of the Conservative Care Committee and Section Development Committee and then Co-chair of the combined Medical-Surgical Care Committee. He started the Rehabilitation, Interventor and Medical Spine Section. Dr. Schofferman served on the NASS Board of Directors as Chair of both the Section Development Committee and Ethics & Professionalism Committee. Dr. Schofferman provided critical input on the initial formulation on the society’s position on conflict of interest to put NASS at the forefront of medical societies addressing ethics and professionalism. He has championed medical ethics with thought-provoking presentations and seminars.
2018 Past President Award: Jean-Jacques Abitbol, MD  
_Nominated by Jeffrey C. Wang, MD, and David R. O’Brien Jr., MD_

JJ Abitbol, MD, continues to be a devoted advocate for excellence in spine care through education and research. Dr. Abitbol was NASS President in 2005-2006 and served on the Board for more than 10 years. He rose through the ranks, having served on the Coding Committee, Education Council, Industry Relations Committee and acted as Program Chair for numerous programs, including the 1998 Annual Meeting. His vision brought about the Specialty Education & Research Center (SERC) at NASS where he still serves as its medical director. Dr. Abitbol has also played a key role in furthering excellence in spine care internationally through extensive participation in NASS’ international education efforts by serving as faculty or workshop instructor at programs in Dubai, Singapore, Indonesia, and China, as well as a multitude of other places. Dr. Abitbol has been a great ambassador for NASS and the spine field through his consistently reasonable approach to spine care through his research and his teachings.

2018 Spine Advocacy Award: John G. Finkenberg, MD  
_To recognize members of the North American Spine Society who have made exceptional contributions to the federal advocacy efforts on behalf of patients and members of the society._  
_Nominated by the NASS Advocacy Council_

John G. Finkenberg, MD, served on the Advocacy Council for 13 years, six of which he served as Advocacy Council Director and President of the National Association of Spine Specialists (the advocacy arm to NASS’ political involvement on Capitol Hill). In 2014, Dr. Finkenberg successfully sought approval by the NASS Board of Directors to elevate and transform Advocacy from a Committee into a Council and laid the groundwork for the development of the recently established NASS Legislative Committee. An avid advocate for spine care providers and patients, Dr. Finkenberg represented NASS before Congress and visited Washington, DC on numerous occasions, and is well-known in the hallways of Congress. Dr. Finkenberg was instrumental in efforts to replace Medicare’s Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula and repealing the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB). During his tenure as the Chair of the SpinePAC Board of Directors, Dr. Finkenberg oversaw the second-highest fundraising cycle in SpinePAC’s history, reaching $185,000 in donations during the 2015-2016 election cycle. In addition to representing NASS before Congress, Dr. Finkenberg oversaw the coordination of several NASS Town Hall events across the country and frequently attended these engagements to provide NASS members an update on the various advocacy and health policy activities of the society. Dr. Finkenberg has been in private practice with Alvarado Orthopedic Medical Group in San Diego, California since 1992. He is a general orthopedic surgeon who has obtained fellowship training after his orthopedic residency in advanced spinal reconstructive surgery. After attending UCLA Medical School, he completed his orthopedic training at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center in Torrance, California. He has been the Chief of the Orthopedic Department at Alvarado Hospital Medical Center and has served on the Executive Supervisory Committee for many years. In his spare time, he enjoys sports, sculpting bronze figures and advocating for better health care in Washington, DC.
More than 3,000 spine professionals will meet at the NASS 33rd Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, September 26-29, 2018 at the Los Angeles Convention Center to share the latest information, innovative techniques and procedures, best practices and new technologies in the spine field. NASS is a multidisciplinary medical organization dedicated to fostering the highest quality, evidenced-based and ethical spine care by promoting education, research and advocacy. NASS is comprised of more than 8,000 members from several disciplines, including orthopedic surgery, neurosurgery, psychiatry, neurology, radiology, anesthesiology, research and physical therapy. For more information, visit www.spine.org, NASS Facebook and NASS Twitter.

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