What Does FACC Mean to You?

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Each year 750 or more cardiovascular specialists (mostly adult cardiologists) become new Fellows of the College and earn the designation FACC. The vast majority of these physicians and scientists are in the United States, although there is an increasing interest in this achievement around the world. As outlined in the ACC application for membership booklet, "The designation of Fellow represents recognition by the College of high professional achievement in a cardiovascular discipline." In general, the usual course for achieving Fellowship is to complete appropriate training, pass subspecialty boards and be recognized in the community as a practicing subspecialist. Candidates residing outside North America "will generally be recognized as clearly outstanding in their own country and usually will have achieved an international reputation." It is clear from all of these statements that FACC is meant to recognize cardiovascular specialists who embody the best in our profession.

It is therefore pertinent to ask each Fellow of the College: What does FACC mean to you? Is it merely another certificate to hang on the wall? Does it represent added economic potential? Does it make you better than those who don't have it? Does it help your promotion in a medical school? Does it satisfy your innate desire to be a high achiever? Among these considerations I hope that the primary meaning of FACC would be a stimulus to live up to the high ideals of the College and to be loyal to the College and its programs. Certainly the College is loyal to its Fellows and does all it can to support educational activities and other interests of its members.

As a current member of the Credentials Committee of the College, I report two items of interest that came up at our last meeting. First, in reviewing the correspondence related to individual applications, we came across three individuals applying for College Fellowship who were already using the designation FACC on their stationery. By now these individuals have received a letter from the Executive Vice President instructing them to immediately remove this designation from their stationery and to provide a letter of explanation. In the past, some physicians have indicated that they thought that they could automatically begin to use the designation FACC once they passed their subspecialty boards. This is not the case. Applicants for Fellowship must go through a rigorous application process, which includes a time interval of at least 18 months after completion of their training so that they can receive a supporting letter from a Fellow of the College in their community, attesting to their high level of performance as a practicing cardiovascular subspecialist.

Second, to assess the practice of using FACC on one's stationery, I reviewed 243 consecutive letterheads that included the printed name of a Fellow of the College. All letters were submitted in support of Fellowship applications submitted to the Credentials Committee. Letterheads with no printed name were excluded from this series. Because there was a difference depending on whether or not the correspondent was a faculty member of a university hospital, I have classified the results as in Table 1.

Although this is not a comprehensive survey, it is a consecutive series from a random sample of Fellowship applications and thus is probably representative of College Fellows as a whole. Interestingly, FACC was used far more commonly than any designation of certification by an appropriate subspecialty board. In almost all cases, FACC was added after the typed signature at the bottom of the letter.

Table 1 shows that cardiologists in private practice are much more likely to use FACC on their letterhead than are university-based cardiologists. It is possible that university-based cardiologists prefer to use academic professional titles. In some cases where the names of several members of a group are printed on the letterhead, it may be that the designation FACC is avoided because not all members are Fellows. In any event, it is clear that about two thirds of cardiologists in private practice feel that it is important to include FACC on their official letterhead.

The designation FACC has always had special significance to me. Some of the language from the application booklet highlights some of the feelings I have about the
College. "The College is composed of physicians and scientists of goodwill and high standing who are dedicated. . . . Members are expected to have demonstrated satisfactory humanistic and collegial qualities and to conform to high moral and ethical standards. . . . Candidates shall provide evidence from their communities that they are recognized as specialists and consultants or as scientists. . . . Excellence of the membership is of paramount importance." As you review your own perception of what FACC means to you, I hope that you have similar positive feelings. Whether or not you use it on your official letterhead or after your typed name at the bottom of the letter, I trust that it will remain an important and cherished milestone in your career.

Table 1. Use of FACC on Letterhead Stationery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Use FACC</th>
<th>Do Not Use FACC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardiologist in private practice</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty member in a university hospital</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>47</td>
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