

ACC NEWS



President's Page: Challenging the Future With the Success of Our Past

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The American College of Cardiology (ACC) will be commemorating its 50th anniversary on December 2, 1999—50 years from the day that the ACC charter was signed. I'm sure the founders of the College could not have imagined at that time the discoveries and technologies that have improved patient care and lessened the death and suffering from heart disease. Founders such as Dr. Franz Groedel, Dr. Bruno Kisch, Max Miller and Dr. Philip Reichert would be proud to know that the educational foundation they established has grown tremendously, mirroring the explosion of knowledge in diagnosing and treating cardiovascular (CV) disease.

The College's 50th anniversary is several years away, but we are already laying the ground work to launch a fitting commemorative celebration. A few months ago, the ACC Board of Trustees appointed a committee to lead this endeavor. As chair of the committee, I am joined by the following colleagues: Ruth L. Collins-Nakai, MD, Leonard S. Dreifus, MD, Valentin Fuster, MD, PhD, W. Bruce Fye, MD, Sharon Ann Hunt, MD, Francis J. Klocke, MD, William D. Nelligan, Rick A. Nishimura, MD, H. J. C. Swan, MD, PhD, Daniel J. Ulljot, MD, John F. Williams, MD, and Michael J. Wolk, MD. It is our charge to develop and implement a strategy for the commemoration of the ACC's 50th anniversary that will reflect on our past and serve as a guide into the 21st century.

The late 1940s saw the beginning of modern medical research and, specifically, heart research. Thus, not only does the ACC mark its 50th anniversary from the late 1940s, but also do the American Heart Association (AHA), as a voluntary health organization, and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), both turning 50 in 1998. The growth of the College reflects the growth of the profession, which was fueled by government research grants from the National Heart Institute (now the NHLBI) and private grants through the AHA. The ACC performed—and still performs—the critical role of

translating the new knowledge into clinical practice for cardiovascular specialists and other health care professionals.

The primary way that we perform this function is through the leadership and coordination by the ACC staff at Heart House, ACC headquarters. It is because of the forward thinking of early College leaders that Heart House was established. Heart House has been a source of educational innovation in numerous ways with the first of its kind Learning Center; educational products that use audiotapes and videotapes and now CD-ROMs, satellite video conferences and the World Wide Web; practice guidelines in collaboration with the AHA; and conferences and educational sessions on important clinical, educational and practice issues.

In every facet of our College, we are fulfilling the mission to bring important new knowledge to the cardiovascular community, whether in managed care organizations, academic medical centers, community hospitals or private practice. This is why the College has grown from a fledgling organization in 1949 to one that boasts a membership of over 23,000 cardiovascular specialists today, with influence from Washington, D.C., to state legislatures across the country. A large part of the College's influence is due to the fact that its membership includes more than 90% of board-certified CV specialists. However, our mission gets tougher every day as academic medical centers struggle to survive, clinical investigators are being shut off from research support, and CV specialists have to prove their value to managed care in order to treat patients with heart disease.

History can teach us many valuable lessons, but only if we understand and apply them. It is my hope that the government and managed care organizations will take note of lessons from the past and use this knowledge to make sound policy for the future. Cardiovascular medicine has grown to be the largest specialty because of patient demand, and this demand is based on the quality of care that CV specialists bring to patients every day. Thanks to CV research since 1949, CV specialists have

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reduced the age-adjusted mortality rate of the nation's number one killer by 50% and dramatically reduced morbidity for the survivors. This is a record unmatched in medicine during the last 50 years.

"But the future is another story," said Dr. Bruce Fye, College historian and author, at the launch of his history book on American cardiology, in March 1996 (1). "When someone writes the history of American cardiology's second half-century, they'll have to work harder than I did to convey the very real sense of anticipation and accomplishment that has characterized the specialty for decades."

It is the hope of the College and, I'm sure, Dr. Fye that his predictions do not become reality. At a time when CV diseases have replaced infectious diseases as the number one health problem of the world, we will have to strive even harder to

create a new legacy for our specialty and for the patients we serve, building another half century of success and making the next cardiology historian's efforts as rewarding as Dr. Fye's.

The College will continue to be a leader in creating this new legacy, and we will be using the 50th anniversary celebration as a launching pad into the next century. You'll be hearing more about the 50th anniversary activities as we approach 1999, as we respond to the challenge to make our future to be as bright as our past.

Reference

1. Fye WB. The History of a Specialty and its College. Baltimore (MD): Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.