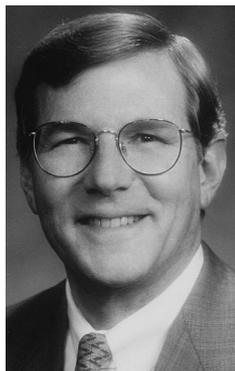


ACC NEWS



President's Page: Education—The Foundation and Future of the ACC

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As cardiovascular specialists, we constantly strive to stay up-to-date and provide patients with the "latest and greatest" care possible. The value of continuing education for us is seeing the direct impact our care has made on the lives of our patients and their families. New information on cardiovascular disease seems to be developing at an exponential pace. For this reason, the enduring quest to improve our knowledge and skills and, in turn, patient care, makes modern cardiology one of the most challenging specialties in the medical profession.

Perhaps no medical society in the world places as much emphasis on education as the American College of Cardiology (ACC). Indeed, the very reason that Dr. Franz Groedel founded the ACC in 1949 was to create an organization whose mission would be continuing medical education (CME) for the purpose of improving patient care. Through its formative years, the ACC provided CME at a time when there were not many options for physicians who wanted to stay abreast of new knowledge, therapeutic approaches and medical procedures in the fledgling specialty of cardiovascular medicine (1). Central to the ACC's ability to provide quality CME programs are the physicians behind these efforts: the organizers and instructors in these programs. Their spectacular level of volunteerism enables the College to achieve its mission and embodies the spirit and vision of our founding members.

The College has thrived as a professional society because of the value that its members place on education. The first annual meeting of the ACC dates back to 1951; the College sponsored its first clinical workshops in 1955; and the first college-sponsored, medical center-based symposium was held in 1961. All were conducted by ACC members (1). More than a decade later, a small group that included Drs. E. Grey Dimond, B. L. Martz and Dwight E. Harken, would propose the idea of building a high-tech classroom as part of the ACC headquarters to enhance the education process.

Their idea became a reality in 1977, when the ACC built the Learning Center classroom at the ACC's headquarters in Bethesda, Maryland. On the Learning Center's completion in 1977, Dr. Dimond stated that it should be the world's exhibition hall of teaching and learning (2). What was then a technologically advanced classroom, far ahead of its time and unlike any other in the world, is still without equal as the Learning Center celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The intimate environment and ability to interact with members of the faculty provide a unique learning experience. Certainly, those founding members of both the ACC and the Learning Center are to be admired for their extraordinary vision and purpose.

The Learning Center and Heart House also serve as a classroom without walls. They have truly become a national and international center for all issues relating to the knowledge and lack of knowledge of the heart (2). The College's CME activities do not stop with its own educational center, but they extend to all parts of the United States and the world.

The ACC extramural programs are just one of the ways that the College makes education available outside the walls of Heart House. In keeping with the broad range of pressures physicians now face, nonclinical issues—such as evidence-based medicine, quality improvement and practice management—as well as important clinical issues are being addressed by the College's CME programs (3). Using the ACC/American Heart Association (AHA) Guidelines for the treatment of our patients is also an educational exercise as we explore these guidelines, the basis for them and the specific alterations that often are needed for individual patients.

The contributions made by the directors and participating members of all these programs merit special attention. Untold amounts of time and energy are expended by our colleagues, who essentially are volunteers, to help provide better cardiovascular care for all our patients. This commitment was the foundation of the College and is the reason that we will remain *the* organization for cardiovascular specialists and those pro-

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viding cardiovascular care. As the demands on our people and their time continue to expand, the College must give special attention to how it will continue serving this need. We will explore ways to make it compellingly attractive to conduct and attend courses and to participate in other educational activities.

The Annual Scientific Session is another way in which the College educates its members and other health care professionals, reaching a global audience with new research and practice information. Even such a successful venture as our annual meeting can be improved, and the College will be revising its ongoing efforts to institute positive changes.

The journal in your hands is a dependable source for up-to-date clinical information on all aspects of cardiovascular disease. The *Journal of the American College of Cardiology (JACC)* reflects advances in the treatment of heart disease that cardiovascular specialists and the medical device and drug industry continue to make every day. Such advances must be communicated to all practitioners who see patients with heart disease. We are very proud of *JACC* and the superb job done by Dr. Parmley and his staff to keep up this standard of publication.

However, as physicians attempt to keep up with new knowledge, we are being assaulted by administrative, political, regulatory and financial pressures that compete for our time and hamper our ability to provide quality patient care. We have more information to absorb but less time and money to expend on this critically important activity. Now, more than ever, education is one of the most significant assets of the College. As cardiology evolves, the ACC continues to respond, providing numerous ways to receive education through traditional methods, such as the Learning Center and extramural programs, and also through newer communication modes, such as video, computer products, the Internet and satellite teleconferences.

The success of the ACC's Learning Center satellite teleconferences, the most recent of which drew 2,000 viewers from the United States and almost 1,000 viewers from the Middle East, demonstrates the value of bringing education directly to physicians' communities. In addition, personal computers allow interactivity that cannot be matched by other means. The ACC has developed numerous self-assessment computer products on subjects such as adult clinical cardiology, electrocardiography, echocardiography and a cardiovascular board review, with many more to come.

The popularity of the Internet has changed the way we live and think, and it will certainly change the way we learn. The ability to personalize learning and to organize vast amounts of information to meet the needs of each member are opportunities that suggest we are past the point of asking whether this can occur; now we only ask how and when this will occur optimally (3). The College is meeting this challenge by using its new home page as another source for physician education. On-line CME will soon be available, and the *JACC* Forum was recently launched to bring articles in the Journal to life through moderated discussions of their content.

A recent ACC survey reveals that members feel that a shortage of time and information overload affect the way they obtain CME (3). We want to help by filtering information into small, brief, useful segments. The College's goal, as we approach the millennium, is to continue to uncover new modes of delivery that best address these changing needs.

I believe that the ACC has a firm grasp on the possibility that the future holds for our specialty and the educational opportunities on which it thrives. At the center of these efforts will be you, the member, who must play an active role by not only participating in your own education, but also by steering the course of the ACC. It has been said that education is a debt due from present to future generations. Much as the ACC's first leaders have paid their debt by building our educational foundation, we must make our contribution to future generations by preserving and improving the role of lifelong learning served by the ACC. Even as it becomes more difficult to make time to keep up with the expanding information about cardiovascular disease, the value of this information to our patients increases. The ACC will do everything it can to help its members, and others, stay educated in practical and effective ways. This is one of our greatest traditions, and it must be continued.

References

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2. Dimond EG. ACCEL. Bethesda (MD): American College of Cardiology, 1997 (July):1-2.
3. ACC Needs Assessment Survey, May, 1997. Princeton (NJ): Gallup Organization.