During our careers, we have witnessed an explosion of scientific and clinical knowledge aided by new technologies and a growing network of supportive, specialized health care professionals. More investment in treatment and prevention research is fueling medical innovation. The average life span is growing significantly, providing new lifestyle opportunities for living healthfully into our 70s, 80s, and beyond. Advancements in cardiovascular disease prevention, interventional cardiology, electrophysiology, and diagnosis have played a major role in these developments. According to a report recently released by a consortium of credible health care groups (1), U.S. mortality rates due to heart attack have dropped by 47% in the two decades from 1980 to 2000.

Yet, cardiovascular disease remains the number-one killer disease in the U.S. and is the developing world’s leading health threat. Obesity and diabetes, two high-risk conditions that fuel the incidence of cardiovascular disease, are growing epidemics. Even now, as we begin to realize that our profession is moving toward an era of prevention as a means to curb cardiovascular disease, specialized care will be necessary for several more generations of people—those raised on “happy meals” and convenience foods loaded with cholesterol, fat, and sodium, content to remain physically inactive, and those who continue to smoke cigarettes or expose themselves to tobacco smoke.

Heightened public and patient education are essential elements in carrying forth our College’s mission. More opinion leaders, voters, and elected officials must learn that every dollar invested in health care brings health benefits double or triple the value of the original investment (1). That is an impressive investment and an impressive statistic for any business transaction, let alone health care, which has a pivotal impact on the social, moral, and economic well-being of our country.

The ACC’s potential influence on U.S. health care policy should not be underestimated. The College’s updated mission statement, to “advocate for quality cardiovascular care—through education, research promotion, development and application of standards and guidelines—and to influence health care policy” expands the ACC’s mission beyond traditional boundaries of physician education. In fact, the College’s educational mission has expanded to global proportions.

Among the College’s many goals and tactics, leadership in education is key, and the College seeks to:

- ensure that patients and the public receive the most up-to-date care;
- ensure that patients understand the value of the cardiovascular specialist and the cardiac care team;
- strengthen advocacy efforts and open doors to members’ patients;
- recognize the different needs of cardiovascular member organizations and encourage collaborative efforts with them; and
- help the College expand into more countries with an education-based presence.

Of course, continuing education for its members remains at the foundation of the College’s mission. The ACC ambitiously seeks to:

- deliver online professional education to provide “24/7” access to current research, guidelines, education, and relevant patient care information;
- enhance live programs, making them more responsive to members’ needs;
- incorporate criteria for needs assessment, innovative design, and measurement of physician learning and change outcomes;
- reach new audiences; and
- implement plans for innovative educational products.

To increase awareness of cardiovascular risk and learn how to reduce that risk, the need for a highly visible, national clearinghouse of reliable information about cardiovascular disease, treatment, and prevention is becoming more apparent. The College’s leadership role as the definitive source of useful, relevant information about cardiovascular science dovetails with another Board of Trustees plan to re-imagine Heart House, increase its outreach capacity, and provide direct access for more people. The College, as
both a national and international “go-to” organization, requires increased visibility and better public access to secure its position at the forefront of combating cardiovascular disease and improving cardiovascular care for patients everywhere.

In its plan to move Heart House—the College’s headquarters in Bethesda, Maryland—to a more central location in Washington, D.C., the Board of Trustees has taken into account the College’s long-term role, goals, and responsibilities. On the new site, yet to be procured, we will build a structure to accommodate the College’s continuous transformation and growth, which should help strengthen its performance as a global leader in all issues related to cardiovascular care. Over the past decade and a half, the ACC has become significantly more involved in health care policy by building credibility with policy-makers and providing analysis of proposals, their impact, and their ability to deliver quality cardiovascular care—in general, establishing itself as an objective, well-informed source in the health care arena.

In addition, the College is committed to developing many more constructive relationships with payers and health plans, as well as government, in order to improve quality of cardiovascular care and, at the same time, reduce administrative burdens on physician practices. Through technology, we can share our intellectual resources; but through proximity, we can become more closely connected to those most important to our work and grow indispensable to authorities who can help us maximize opportunities to reach our goals.

To pursue activities that bring positive change and to preserve our profession’s future security and integrity, it is entirely appropriate that the ACC move its operations closer to the hub of national and federal agencies and to the public and private organizations that exert vast influence over the future of health care. The College intends to build an academic and practical home for cardiovascular medicine that will beckon members; staff; nonprofit, government, and corporate partners; neighbors; and members of other cardiovascular societies. Our new Heart House will also be a model of respect for the environment and will communicate the value of good health. It will inspire today’s youth to become the cardiovascular leaders of tomorrow.

Simply put, it is good business to move the College headquarters to Washington, D.C. Economically, the District of Columbia welcomes the prospect. It recognizes that the College brings an investment of people and resources. In return, the District government is offering generous incentives and an address that puts the ACC on the map of nationally important organizations—among respected think tanks, prestigious universities, and influential foundations.

Exactly what the new College headquarters will look like is still evolving. Ideas from more than 250 stakeholders who participated in a “visioning” process lead us to believe that our new facility will become the preeminent showcase for the treatment of heart disease, a state-of-the-art building that draws people inside to learn more about prevention and a heart-healthy lifestyle. A new educational space in the tradition of the Learning Center will be at the core of our new facility, enhanced with state-of-the-art technology to provide meaningful, individualized learning experiences as well as better communication during conferences, meetings, and other member-to-member or member-to-staff interactions. We envision a flexible and vibrant meeting place for health care leaders, members, supportive specialized professionals, students, adults, and children interested in our mission. We believe that the future Heart House will become an exciting educational resource, supporting professional development and staff/member teamwork.

Washington, D.C., not only functions as our capital city, it symbolizes our nation’s strength and leadership. Globally, citizens and professionals alike know that Washington, D.C., is where the most influential leaders, high-ranking federal executives, members of Congress, and other critical decision-makers gather and do business. It is a city that commands respect and signals focused determination and purposeful activity. It is an ideal home for Heart House of the future.

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REFERENCE