President’s Page:
New York 1952 to Atlanta 2006:
Celebrating the Cardiovascular Community

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The American College of Cardiology (ACC) made history in June 1952 with its inaugural scientific sessions in New York City, setting in motion the ACC’s current emphasis on top-flight education. From March 11 to 14, the 55th Annual Scientific Sessions (ACC.06) will host nearly 30,000 attendees in Atlanta, Georgia, proudly advancing this tradition of truly exceptional learning, networking, and sharing. The Georgia World Congress Center will be bustling with seasoned FACCs, newly inducted fellows of the College, cardiac care associates, and thousands of international practitioners. Clearly, ACC.06 is a global cardiovascular event that reflects the world-wide nature of cardiovascular disease and the diversity that now defines our health care community.

As the premier educational offering of the College, the annual scientific sessions warrant periodic review to be sure they continue to meet changing learning needs. The emergence of cardiovascular subspecialty meetings and the advent of the Internet’s ability to rapidly access clinical and medical product information raised the question regarding the relevance of our large annual meeting. A careful examination of the history and evolution of the scientific sessions, however, provides solid assurance that the College has continually adapted over the last half century while firmly establishing ACC.06 as the centerpiece of cardiovascular provider education. Whereas the venues, speakers, topics, and attendees naturally have changed over time, the College’s commitment to superb cardiovascular education has remained steadfast.

We are a “college” of medical providers. As such, the yearly tradition of gathering in the spring to consider and discuss the latest advancements in our specialty reflects the collegial and scholarly nature of our profession. Our position at the forefront of bringing cardiovascular research to clinicians is obvious when reviewing key presentations from the scientific sessions. In 1971, at the 20th Annual Sessions, Sol Sherry delivered the opening plenary presentation entitled “Prospects in Antithrombotic Therapy.” This was seven years before DeWood’s landmark observation that acute myocardial infarction was, indeed, caused by coronary thrombosis (1). Twenty years later, Leroy Hood, presenting in the opening plenary session, spoke about the “Human Genome Initiative.” Three of the last four opening plenary sessions have addressed the role of cardiovascular genetics in caring for our patients.

While delivering world-class scientific information to attendees, the scientific sessions have also offered insights into the role of cardiovascular medicine in a broader humanistic societal context. At the 3rd Annual Scientific Sessions in 1954, Auston Smith delivered a lecture on the “Use and Misuse of Medical Information.” Such a topic retains relevance today as we consider the goals of integrating medical information technology into common information systems. At this year’s meeting, a panel of experts will be addressing this topic in a special session branded “Concept Cardiology.”

We continually have sought out and hosted expert speakers from other fields to remind us of the broader societal issues and concerns regarding medical care and the medical profession. In 1975, Leon Jaworski spoke on the “Role of Leadership,” in 1981 Danny Kaye talked about “Life, Love, Laughter, and Our Heart,” and at the 1993 meetings the College was addressed by Timothy Johnson, discussing “Health Care and Communication in the Nineties.”

There is a continuity and tradition about much of the annual scientific sessions that is befitting a collegial organization. The meetings have long been a rite of passage for the first half of the calendar year. Since the 26th Annual Sessions in 1977, the meetings have regularly and reliably been held in mid-March,
giving us a predictable educational marker of the approaching spring. Since 1982, we have regularly visited the same rotation of cities (Atlanta, New Orleans, Dallas, and Anaheim) like a group of old friends. In the last 10 years, Orlando and Chicago have been added to the mix, providing additional and excellent family and cultural extracurricular activities.

There is value in recalling speakers who have given major presentations at scientific sessions over the years. Seeing familiar names giving presentations at different times over their distinguished careers speaks to the stability of our profession and reminds us of the major contributions of our professors, mentors, and colleagues. Eugene Braunwald was listed as the opening plenary session speaker in 1970 and 1973. Who better, then, to deliver the Simon Dack opening plenary session lecture entitled “Cardiology: Past, Present and Future” 30 years later than Dr. Braunwald in 2003?

The annual scientific sessions reflect the College’s strong commitment to international collaboration and education. A full third of professional attendees reside outside the U.S., almost 18% of invited speakers are from the international community, and approximately 50% of the accepted abstracts are from investigators outside the U.S. The Louis F. Bishop lecture has long recognized the contributions of our international colleagues with presentations over the years by such influential figures as Rene Favaloro, Attilio Maseri, and Peter Sleight. In 2002, the College formally acknowledged the importance of this international collaboration by introducing an annual international lecture. The inaugural address was fittingly given by a long-time friend of the College, Attilio Maseri, speaking on “Inflammation, Atherosclerosis, and Acute Coronary Syndromes.”

Although the history of the annual scientific sessions is rich, resting on the strength of history and tradition would be a mistake in a field that moves as rapidly as cardiovascular medicine. The College, therefore, commissioned a Task Force in 2004, chaired by W. Douglas Weaver, to review the meeting’s strategic importance to the membership and to provide recommendations to guide future annual meetings. The Task Force recommended that educational content be more closely matched to members’ expressed needs, that the form of the forum should support interactive and engaging presentation of the most impactful science while focusing on application to daily clinical practice, and it should actively foster interaction among the spontaneously growing number of communities within the broader cardiovascular community (groups such as fellows-in-training, cardiac care associates, and members of key cardiovascular subspecialty societies).

Following these recommendations, the ACC.06 Scientific Sessions will be a new and innovative meeting. Recognition of this is the core theme for this year’s meeting: “Celebrating the Cardiovascular Community.” Introduction of a major stand-alone meeting for interventional cardiology, Innovation in Intervention: i2 Summit 2006 (i2), reflects the bold direction being taken by the College to understand and meet the needs of our membership (2). The ACC.06 Scientific Sessions also will put into practice key Task Force recommendations dealing with content and structure (3). The official program will start Saturday afternoon with an expanded opening session for ACC.06 and the i2 Summit, including a dedicated reception marking the opening of the exhibit hall, and ends Tuesday evening with a special closing ceremony bringing attendees of ACC.06 and i2 together for highlight sessions.

Popular spotlight sessions on Sunday will address requests for more integrated case-based learning, including board review-style education. A new integrated imaging spotlight merges the old echo, CT/MRI, and nuclear spotlights to create a single all-day session built along practical clinical questions. The ClinCard spotlight will offer a “year-in-review” of topical clinical issues followed by moderated expert panels focusing on ACCSAP board review-style questions. Late-breaking clinical trials have been expanded to include first announcements of major clinical trial results and a group of innovative and novel smaller trials, such as first-in-human experiences. The ACC.TV will bring nine hours of live programming each day to attendees throughout the center, including all press conferences for attendees interested in learning how the lay press is interpreting the latest cardiovascular news.

The ACC.06 will embrace a multimedia approach to education. There are plans for concurrent online publication in our Journal of the American College of Cardiology (JACC) of some of the major presentations and most important abstracts. Community rooms will enable networking and interchange among groups interested in specific topic areas—imaging, electrophysiology, vascular and prevention, and heart failure—as well as by special constituencies—fellows-in-training and cardiac care associates. In these rooms, posters and video streaming of major presentations will support intimate education, as well as the opportunity for more informal, personal interactions and discussions among colleagues.

The annual scientific sessions have an established and distinguished history for the College and its members, and ACC.06 will add to the lore through innovative educational sessions that provide the expected collegial forum for friends and colleagues to meet, discuss, and consider the latest advances in cardiovascular medicine. Your presence and contribution to this dynamic discussion makes the ACC.06 the powerhouse of education it has become world-wide. We look forward to seeing you in Atlanta!

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REFERENCES