

JOINT SECTION ON DISORDERS OF THE SPINE AND PERIPHERAL NERVES
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
MONDAY APRIL 27, 1998
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
PHILADELPHIA MARRIOTT, SALON J
1:00 P.M.

Members Present: S. Papadopoulos, V. Traynelis, R. Fessler, C. Dickman, M. Hadley, C. Branch, G. Rea, N. Baldwin, L. Harkey, G. Rodts, T. Ryken, R. Haid, K. Foley, P. McCormick, N. Perin, R. Heary, J. Hollowell, A. Belzberg, M. Fehlings, B. Cuddy

Visitors: Hank Polson, Robert Draba, Russell Travis

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Dr. Papadopoulos. Minutes from the previous Executive Committee meeting and annual business meeting were approved.

Dr. Fehlings presented the STASCIS report. He noted the work which has been done to date by STASCIS and their plans for applying to NIH for further funding. He stated that the Trauma Section had provided \$5,000 in support and that at one time the Spine Section had also approved \$5,000 in support. He stated that no monies have been received from the Spine Section. Dr. Papadopoulos expressed concern that recognition of both Sections be given for all presentations and publications referable to the STASCIS project. Dr. Fehlings stated that it was always the intent of the STASCIS group to provide recognition to both parties. After discussion, it was concluded that Dr. Fehlings would write the Treasurer to obtain the money for funding.

Russell Travis addressed the Executive Committee. He stated that exhibits and meeting management are combined within the AANS office. Dr. Papadopoulos questioned whether the Spine Section would need a contractual agreement for meeting planning with the AANS in the future. Dr. Travis stated that a memorandum of goals and contacts would probably be appropriate.

Dr. Dickman presented the Treasurer's report. He stated that the meeting was successful financially but there were still some outstanding bills. It was his opinion that ultimately approximately \$40,000 of revenue would be realized from the meeting. From 1996 through 1997 there was a net increase in assets of \$65,000. In the discussion that followed, concern was expressed that the increase in Section assets may be mostly due to growth in investments and that, in fact, the Section is operating at an operational deficit. Dr. Dickman stated that he would examine these parameters of the financial situation more closely and provide a report at the next Executive Committee meeting. Dr. Papadopoulos queried Dr. Draba on indirect staff time allocations and expressed concern that these were in the neighborhood of \$25,000 in 1996 and had increased to almost \$35,000 in 1997. Dr. Draba replied that he would investigate the matter and inform the Section as to the reason for this increase.

Dr. Harkey presented a summary of the 1998 meeting. He stated that the trend of decreasing attendance had persisted in spite of the fact that the scientific program was very well received. He noted there were a few complaints regarding some of the social functions. Dr. Papadopoulos expressed concerns that the healthy growth of the Section meeting in the early and mid 1990's has plateaued and is now even decreasing. He noted that income from exhibitors has plateaued. In the discussion that ensued, Dr. Foley suggested that the Section members who did not attend the meeting be polled as to the reason why. It was noted that the intense scientific program left the participants with little free time and this may be having a negative impact on attendance. Dr. Rodts called several individuals who did not attend the meeting and found that most stated that their nonattendance was due to financial and contractual reasons. Dr. Belzberg also asked several neurosurgeons in the Baltimore and Washington area why they did not attend the meeting. He stated that the most common reason given was that people were going to another course or wanted to go to NASS. Dr. Travis suggested that we scale back on some of the scientific portion of the meeting so that at least one afternoon is free. Dr. Papadopoulos noted that there has never been serious marketing of the meeting. It is only advertised in the newsletter and in meeting

announcements in the journals. It was the general consensus of the Committee that the meeting be marketed in a more vigorous manner. It was noted that some of the CNS/AANS programs were similar to Section meetings and this may be adversely affecting attendance. Dr. Haid suggested that the meeting be promoted more to the orthopedic community.

Dr. Papadopoulos discussed a proposal by an organization entitled GICD-USA. This group is funded by Sofamor Danek with an unrestricted grant. Essentially, the GICD board can use the monies to produce educational programs in a nonbiased way. GICD has put on pre-meeting courses in the past which usually take place the day before the meeting. The GICD group has expressed interest in having such a pre-meeting event prior to next year's annual meeting. The target population would be the European community. Dr. Papadopoulos suggested that perhaps this could be packaged with our meeting. GICD stated that any profits made would be donated to the Section. Dr. Harkey noted that such a pre-meeting event would compete with some of the Wednesday practical courses. Dr. Dickman expressed concern about ethical issues with GICD. In the discussion that followed, several individuals expressed concern about a lack of definite goals of the Section in terms of the annual meeting. The proposal was ultimately tabled for the further discussion at the fall meeting.

Dr. Papadopoulos expressed concerns regarding exhibitor issues. A number of ideas aimed at making the participants visit the exhibitors were discussed. Some of these included having noted surgeons in the exhibit area giving informal presentations. The concept of pursuing "off-label" exhibitors of non-medical products was discussed. It was suggested that the break be increased to one hour so there would be more time for participants to visit with exhibitors. Dr. Papadopoulos requested that Mr. Polson accelerate the exhibit process so industry can place the annual meeting requests within their proposed budgets.

Membership issues were reviewed. Dr. Traynelis noted that contact has been made by members of the organization who wish to become more involved in the Section. The request of such individuals would be honored, and in fact, one such person was placed on the Scientific Program Committee. Dr. Salvador González Cornejo wrote requesting senior membership in the Section. This was approved. Dr. Traynelis will contact Dr. Cornejo and the AANS office. Dr. Haid stated that he knew several orthopedists who expressed interest in AANS/CNS Joint Spine Section membership. It was noted that the by-laws allow such individuals to be adjunct members. The process for obtaining adjunct membership is clearly outlined in the Rules and Regulations. Individuals interested may contact the Secretary of the Section for advice concerning the process. In the course of the discussion, concern was expressed that orthopedists could begin to dominate the Section. It was suggested that the Section may want to establish limits on the percentage of members who may be adjunct members. No formal motion was made regarding this issue.

Dr. Baldwin presented the Rules and Regulations report. He stated that no changes in the Rules and Regulations are in progress at this time.

Dr. Fessler presented the Nominating Committee report. He stated that nominations for Chair-Elect, Member-at-Large, and Secretary are necessary. These nominations will be presented at the fall meeting.

Dr. Foley presented the Education Committee report. He stated that a symposium on the use of lumbar cages would be presented at the CNS meeting. It was suggested that issues regarding bone regeneration and healing be addressed at the next AANS meeting. There was widespread support for this plan.

Dr. Heary presented the Newsletter report. He stated that a newsletter is scheduled to come out in the latter part of May or early June. He is coordinating the newsletter with NEUROSURGERY ON-CALL so it is available on-line.

Dr. Fessler presented the Research Committee report. Specifically, the Committee reviewed a proposal by Dr. Traynelis for funding. The Committee's recommendation was that this proposal be funded. A motion was made to approve the grant funding. The motion was seconded and after discussion was approved by vote.

Drs. Papadopoulos and McCormick discussed the outcomes efforts of the AANS. It was noted that the AANS wants more outcomes studies performed. A process to do this on-line has been devised, and the next study will examine outcomes with lumbar disc surgery. Overall, the plan appears to be economically feasible with the exception of potential costs for audits of the data.

Dr. Hollowell presented a comprehensive CPT Committee report. He discussed some of the elements of budget neutrality which may be maintained between codes, a section of codes, or subspecialty field. He noted that the last "wholesale" restructuring of spinal codes occurred in 1993-1995 and involved the 23000 codes. This resulted in a 10-20% reduction of reimbursement. He indicated that there are a number of individuals who feel spine codes are overvalued. Exposing such codes to reevaluation would most likely result in a reduction of RVU's and, therefore, reimbursement. Even well-intentioned code changes may result in a disadvantageous application of RVU's. After discussion, it was concluded that the Section stance would be to oppose any spine coding changes at this point in time. Dr. Papadopoulos indicated that he would communicate this to Dr. Roski verbally.

Dr. Belzberg presented the Peripheral Nerve Task Force report. He stated that a task force has been established and modeled after similar efforts in neurosurgery such as the Carotid Endarterectomy Task Force. The task force will interface with Dr. Benzel concerning some educational details. The task force is interested in potentially linking to the Neurofibromatosis Foundation to increase the profile of neurosurgeons in the management of such peripheral nerve tumors. The task force is examining educational opportunities. These include anatomy and peripheral nerve dissection courses which continue to be popular at the AANS and Spine meeting. There was interest in presenting more anatomical lectures. Dr. Papadopoulos suggested that Dr. Belzberg interface with Dr. Foley who is the Section Chair of the Education Committee as well as the AANS and CNS annual meeting committees. Finally, Dr. Belzberg stated that a proposal for a prospective randomized study concerning the surgical treatment of ulnar neuropathy was in the formative stage. The Peripheral Nerve Task Force efforts generated enthusiastic approval by the Committee.

Dr. Fessler reported on the Political Advocacy Committee. He indicated that at this time the Washington Committee did not want to provide a seat for every Section but rather wished to serve as a rapid response group to legislatures. The Washington Committee felt that this was better accomplished with a small working group. The Committee did suggest that perhaps at any given time one or two members from the Sections sit on the Washington Committee. This seat could be rotated among the individual subspecialty Sections. Dr. Fessler still stated that it was his intent to organize spinal neurosurgeons in each individual state to serve as liaisons between the medical and political communities.

The next discussion involved the Think First organization. Dr. Branch made a plea for the Section to support this group. In the course of the discussion, it was noted that changes are taking place within the Think First organization and these changes would most likely dictate the future of that organization. Currently, the Think First annual budget is over \$600,000. A motion was made to contribute \$5,000 to the Think First effort. This motion was seconded. After discussion, it was defeated by vote. It was suggested that the entire issue be tabled until Think First reorganizes, and at that time the issue of further support could be revisited.

Dr. Traynelis discussed the publication of papers from the Spine Section annual meeting in the journal *Spine*. He expressed concern that the Section meeting did not receive full acknowledgement within the journal. He will discuss this further with Dr. Weinstein.

Several notes from the AANS office concerning reimbursement questions referable to spinal surgery were discussed. It was noted that these would be directed to the Joint Council of State Neurosurgical Societies for their input.

Dr. Saunders has written the Section regarding a research proposal he made several years ago concerning cervical myelopathy. It was his perception that this proposal had been approved, but the funds had never been received to support the project. After discussion, it was decided by the Executive

Committee that Dr. Saunders should resubmit the research proposal for another review and at that time, if it is approved, funding would be provided.

Dr. Black has requested that the Section provide names of individuals who would be willing to serve as NIH study section reviewers. This request was discussed. An announcement will be placed in the newsletter regarding this issue.

Dr. Papadopoulos discussed the issue of the criteria for a spinal fellowship. He indicated that the Section had created such a document in the past under the leadership of Dr. Sonntag. It was determined that Dr. Sonntag would revise this document and forward it to the AANS.

Dr. Papadopoulos expressed a desire to honor Dr. Sonntag with the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Dr. Fessler discussed communications with the *Journal of Neurosurgery* concerning the development of a specific neurosurgical spine journal. The lack of articles available for publication in the *Journal of Spinal Disorders* was noted. It was determined that this probably would not be a viable journal, and, in general, support of such an idea was not present among the Committee members.

A motion was made, seconded, and approved that the meeting be adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Vincent C. Traynelis, M.D.

Secretary, Joint Section on Disorders of the Spine and Peripheral Nerves

VT:dh