

Role of Professional Societies in Career Development

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ABSTRACT

Professional medical societies serve several functions that may benefit society, the sponsoring medical profession, and individual members. Several professional societies are available for colorectal surgeons to join and participate in. Reasons to join include service, educational offerings, networking, and companionship. Participation can vary from membership to leadership. The advantages and costs of participation and how this may enhance a surgeon's career are described in this article.

KEYWORDS: Professional societies, American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons, American College of Surgeons, career development

Objectives: Upon completion of this article, the reader should be able to describe the professional societies of importance to colorectal surgeons and how participation may assist career development.

Professional medical societies serve several functions that may benefit society, the sponsoring medical profession, and individual members. Several professional societies are available for colorectal surgeons to join and participate in. Here I will discuss several of these organizations and explore reasons surgeons may want to participate in them. Much of the information in this article is my personal opinion and does not represent the official position of the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS) or the Ochsner Clinic.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES OF IMPORTANCE TO COLORECTAL SURGEONS

Professional societies that are important to colon and rectal surgeons along with their Website addresses are listed in Table 1. The Websites should be consulted for

detailed information on the respective organization. The ones listed are selective and not exhaustive. Below I discuss several aspects of each organization. The information may provide some insight, but each organization's Website should be consulted for additional and updated information.

The American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS) is the premier professional society of colon and rectal surgeons. The American Proctologic Society was founded in 1899; in 1959, the organization's name was changed to the ASCRS. Additional information on the history of the organization is available from the book written by Dr. J. Byron Gathright and Dick Bragaw.¹ The society's current membership is 2,200. There are several membership categories including candidate, member, and fellow. The criteria for each is listed on the Website (www.fascrs.org). The society has an annual meeting in the spring. Members receive a

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Table 1 Professional Societies Important to Colorectal Surgeons

American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS): www.fascrs.org
American College of Surgeons (ACS): www.facs.org
American Medical Association (AMA): www.AMA-assn.org
Society of American Gastrointestinal Endoscopic Surgeons: www.SAGES.org
Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract (SSAT): www.SSAT.com
Regional Colorectal Surgery Societies

subscription to *Diseases of the Colon and Rectum* and a Membership Directory, which lists all members with addresses, work phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. Current annual dues range from \$25 for candidates to \$300 for members and fellows. The ASCRS has 22 committees, which are listed in Table 2. Each of these has a mission to provide service to the ASCRS members, our patients, or society. Information on individual committees is available from the society's Website.

The American College of Surgeons (ACS) is the largest professional organization of surgeons. In addition to its educational activities that include an annual meeting in the fall, the organization is politically active. To represent surgeon's interests, the organization communicates to our political leaders with letters, congressional testimony, and a Political Action Committee. Many ASCRS members also belong to the ACS and despite their relatively small numbers (compared with the total ACS membership) they contribute significantly to the organization. Contributions include educational efforts at the annual meeting and participation in multiple committees. As many of the ASCRS members attend the annual ACS meeting, the ASCRS holds many of its committee meetings during the ACS meeting. Current membership dues for fellows is \$520.

The American Medical Association (AMA) is the largest organization of physicians. Unfortunately, surgeons are a smaller percentage of the members and many of the AMA advocacy efforts are guided by the majority. This is often apparent from its political activities. This has led many surgeons to drop their membership. The AMA is the owner of CPT codes and coordinates the

Relative Value Update Committee (RUC). Annual dues are \$420.

The Society of American Gastrointestinal Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES) is composed of a large group of surgeons with an interest in laparoscopy and endoscopy. The annual meeting is held in the spring and dues are \$285.

The Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract (SSAT) is one of the sponsoring organizations at Digestive Diseases Week (DDW). Others include the American Gastroenterology Association (AGA), the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD), and the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy. The meeting is held in May. Most members of SSAT are academic general surgeons. Dues are \$155.

REASONS TO PARTICIPATE IN A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

Professional medical societies serve several functions that may benefit society, the sponsoring medical profession, and individual members. For example, members of the ASCRS produce educational material for patients and providers. It acts as an advocate for patients.

In addition to educational offerings, an organization can assist networking and provide the opportunity for companionship. Many of us initially met colleagues during the interview process for colorectal residencies. This relationship was maintained during courses, board exams, and national meetings of professional societies.

Participation in societies can vary from membership to leadership opportunities, which may enhance a surgeon's career. Advancement in a society starts with membership and attendance at meetings. Some members maintain this level of participation. Others who which to contribute will serve on society committees.

For the past several years, the ASCRS has put out e-mails requesting that any members who wished to serve on committees of the society to identify their interest. Members are also encouraged to contact their mentors or the ASCRS president to express their interest. Members on ASCRS committees are selected by the society president. Appointments are usually for a 3-year period. The choice of a committee may depend on an individual's

Table 2 Committees of the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons

Awards	Membership	Regional Society
Bylaws	New Technology	Research Development
Continuing Education	Operative Competency	Residents
CREST	Professional Outreach	Self-Assessment
History	Program Committee	Socioeconomic
Hospitality	Public Relations	Standards
Local Arrangement	Quality Assessment and Safety	Website
		Young Surgeons

interests or skills. Committees have conference calls throughout the year and meetings at the ASCRS and ACS annual meetings. Failure to attend or participate in meetings will usually lead to not being offered reappointment to this or other committees.

Another opportunity to contribute is to present a talk or poster at the meeting or to moderate a session. Leadership positions in the ASCRS are elected by the membership. Nominations are presented to the society's membership at the annual business meeting. Nominations can come from the society's nominating committee (composed of the past three society presidents) or from the members attending the business meeting. These leadership positions provide an opportunity to serve. The time and energy commitment required of the positions is compensated by some measure of satisfaction for contributions and prestige. Additional opportunities for service are usually offered based on previous performance. It is important that if one volunteers or accepts a service opportunity that you follow through. If circumstances prevent one from participation, it is much better to identify that early. Additional opportunities will be available in the future if one is interested, but failing to follow through on a commitment will limit future opportunities.

The membership and leadership of the ASCRS are committed to maintain the collegial and open atmosphere of the society and its meeting. Members and participants are encouraged to talk to those in attendance and communicate their interest in the soci-

ety. The society wants to serve its members and our patients. The participation of its members makes this possible.

SUMMARY

Professional medical societies serve several functions that may benefit society, the sponsoring medical profession and individual members. Several professional societies are available for colorectal surgeons to join and participate in. Reasons to join include educational offerings, networking, and companionship. Participation can vary from membership to leadership, and the benefits of participation frequently outweigh the time and cost required.

DISCLOSURE

The author is a member of several of the professional societies discussed. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not the societies discussed.

REFERENCE

1. Gathright JB, Bragaw RS. From Mathews to the Millennium—A Century of Achievement. A History of the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons 1899–1999. Marceline, MO: Walsworth Publishing; 1999