Today’s Endeavors Ensure Radiology’s Future

Evoking the stirring themes of achievement, activity, and leadership, leaders of the American College of Radiology gathered once again in the nation’s capital to review the past year’s accomplishments and chart the profession’s direction. Nearly 1,100 members gathered at the ACR’s 83rd Annual Meeting and Chapter Leadership Conference to discuss, debate, and determine the issues and challenges that face radiology today and in the years to come.

EDUCATION – THE KEY TO CLINICAL AND NONCLINICAL SUCCESS

Building on the success of last year’s pre-AMCLC education day and the ACR’s continued commitment to the finest in radiologic education, this year’s gathering kicked off with three challenging, all-day education courses on Saturday, each one focusing on vastly different, yet equally important, subjects for today’s radiologists. This year’s categorical course focused on the challenges of 3-D imaging, focusing on the principles and techniques of 3-D imaging of various organs as well as for applications in pediatric radiology. With question-and-answer sessions and an interactive course review, the course provided attendees with the opportunity to immerse themselves in this challenging imaging method.

Another key education session, the cardiac CT supervised case review, represented the debut of a key component of the College’s new education initiative. Under the direction of Program Chair Diane Strollo, MD, the course supports members’ education needs in the emerging field of cardiac CT with the opportunity to document supervised readings of challenging cases.

The opening day’s third education session was the latest in the ACR’s popular nonclinical business sessions titled “Executive Leadership for Physicians: Tough Skills for Rough Times.” Attendees were introduced to new methods and techniques to tackle many of the nonclinical challenges in today’s radiology environment through sessions such as “Fundamentals of Great Leadership” and “Essentials of Competitive Strategy.”

BORSTEDE – PERSISTENCE, OPPORTUNITY, VISION

The mood of the College’s leaders as they gathered to officially open this year’s AMCLC matched the warmth of the day’s weather, a feeling of optimism and renewed energy. Following the opening remarks of Council Speaker Albert L. Blumberg, MD, Board Chair James P. Borgstede, MD, addressed the Council for the last time as board chair. His excitement about the College’s advancements during the past year in the areas of economics, quality and safety, and education was tempered by his recap of the onerous Deficit Reduction Act of 2005.

With his term as chair coming to a close, Borgstede vowed that the ACR will continue its efforts in opposition to the DRA. “The College will continue to keep patients first and lobby for appropriate reimbursement for services so that our patients can continue to have access to the highest quality imaging care,” he pledged to the audience.

NEIMAN – MANY ACHIEVEMENTS, MANY SUCCESSES

The past year has been one of the most active in the College’s history with success in many areas of ACR activities that serve members’ needs today while setting the stage for additional achievements in the years to come, ACR Executive Director Harvey L. Neiman, MD, told the audience. He cited such successes as the inaugural live webcast that allowed Borgstede to address the membership on critical aspects of the DRA. In all, the webcast received more than 1,300 hits, “far greater than we had anticipated,” Neiman said. He also cited the tremendous growth of the Grass Roots Advocacy program, recent achievements in the College’s research efforts, and continued growth in the College’s efforts to educate other physicians and the public as to the responsibilities and roles of radiologists.

Neiman added to the growing anticipation for the College’s innovative education initiative, the ACR Campus™ which debuted on June 5. “The College is dedicated to being the leader in web-based education, both case-based as well as lecture format, offering these in a variety of new approaches that we believe will be uniquely useful for your continuing education,” he affirmed.

DONALDSON – A NEW APPROACH TO DUES’ INCREASES

With fiscal issues and questions regularly at the forefront of radiologists’ discussions, AMCLC attendees were assured that the College’s financial condition remains very good, with a continued growth in its net assets by ACR Secretary-Treasurer Sarah S. Donaldson, MD. In fact, she noted, the College’s financial standing is consistent with the benchmark of other nonprofits of comparable sizes.

However, Donaldson raised the possibility of the ACR’s first dues increase since 2001, citing the growing number of programs and services the College is offering its members and the profession. While the idea is still in the early discussion stages and no action is
imminent, Donaldson suggested the possibility of small, regularly scheduled dues increases for members that might be tied to another economic index, such as cost of living adjustments.

GUIBERTEAU – WE ARE THE EYES OF MEDICINE

While ACR members have long maintained their dedication to the patients they serve, ACR President Milton J. Guiberteau, MD, encouraged the audience to speak out on what makes radiologists different from other health care practitioners.

“For the profession of radiology to truly flourish, a primary goal must be to define, quantify, and expound, both the value of radiologists to imaging and of imaging to health care,” Guiberteau confirmed. “Medical images in themselves have no value until they are interpreted by a qualified and experienced imager. The intrinsic value in imaging is infused by the radiologist, who derives diagnostic information from the images, synthesizes it with the patient’s clinical findings, and then communicates the results to the patient’s physician, who uses them to manage the patient’s health.”

Despite changes in the health care field, specifically in radiology, Guiberteau vowed that the ACR’s leadership has “maintained an immutable dedication to our traditional goals.”

THE FUTURE OF RADIOLOGY

Residents continue to play an increasing role in ACR activities. This year, 156 residents attended the AMCLC, up from 113 last year. Sanjay K. Shetty, MD, chair of the ACR’s Resident and Fellow Section, reported the group’s significant achievements from the past year, including the complete redesign of the RFS Web site that provides a unique online portal for resident resources.

“Residents are responding to the issues and there are increased resident donations to RADPAC®,” Shetty proudly told the audience. “It is going to be an exciting year.”

NEW OFFICERS NAMED

Arl Van Moore, Jr, MD, president of Charlotte Radiology and medical director of Carolinas Medical Center School of Radiologic Technology, Charlotte, N.C., was named chair of the American College of Radiology Board of Chancellors at the 83rd Annual Meeting and Chapter Leadership Conference held at the Washington Hilton, May 20-25.

Moore, a fellow of the ACR, has served as vice chair of the ACR Board of Chancellors since 2004. He also serves as chair of the ACR delegation to the American Medical Association, chair of the ACR Task Force on International Teleradiology, chair of the ACR Task Force on Disaster Preparedness, chair of the RADPAC® Political Action Committee, vice chair of the ACR advisory committee on diagnostic imaging policy, and is a member of the editorial board of the Journal of the American College of Radiology.

2006 – 2007 ACR OFFICERS

The results of this year’s ACR elections are:

Board of Chancellors (Medical physics) James M. Hevezi, PhD
Board of Chancellors (Pediatrics) Donald P. Frush, MD
Board of Chancellors (Radiation Oncology) Cassandra Foens, MD
Council Steering Committee Kenneth W. Chin, MD
College Nominating Committee Thomas B. Fletcher, MD
Member-in-Training Representatives to the
Representatives to the
Intersociety Committee Bill H. Warren, MD
Richard Duszak, Jr, MD
Nancy E. Gregory, MD
Richard N. Taxin, MD
Nick G. Costouros, MD
David B. Larson, MD

Left to right, Charles D. Williams, MD, Vice President; James P. Borgstede, MD, President; James H. Thrall, MD, Vice Chair; Arl Van Moore, Jr, MD, Chair; Albert L. Blumberg, MD, Council Speaker; Paul H. Ellenbogen, MD, Secretary-Treasurer; and David C. Kushner, MD, Council Vice Speaker.
Gordon S. Perlmutter Honored

The William T. Thorwarth, Jr, MD, Award for Excellence in Economics and Health Policy was presented to Gordon S. Perlmutter, MD, of Wyossing, Pa., on Tuesday, May 22. Perlmutter was honored for his long history of radiology coding initiatives and his many years of service to the ACR, specifically with the Commission on Coding and Nomenclature.

Shown with Gordon S. Perlmutter, center, are: John A. Patti, MD, William T. Thorwarth, Jr, MD, James P. Borgstede, MD, and Pam Kassing, ACR senior director, Economics and Health Policy.

McClellan – Collaboration Is the Key

This year’s Moreton Lecture was delivered by Mark McClellan, MD, PhD, administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, where he discussed his views on a variety of issues relating to radiologists’ reimbursement and adequate measures for determining quality benchmarks.

“This is a challenging time for all of us,” McClellan noted. “Imaging procedures are a part of the fabric of nearly every aspect of medicine today.”

McClellan provided attendees with a recap of how Medicare expenditures increased 8.5 percent last year. However, as imaging procedures are used more frequently and have become more complex in recent years, imaging expenditures grew by about 16 percent during the same period.

“We can only do this in close partnership with organizations such as the ACR,” McClellan continued. “Together we can make quality health care work.”

Following his lecture, McClellan fielded questions from AMCLC attendees, elaborating on the critical issues of Medicare carriers, health care quality improvements and measurement methods, as well as a reasonable, yet adequate, reimbursement method.

The Academic Private Practice Alliance – The Key to Collaboration

During last year’s AMCLC, College leaders established a new task force to study the need for increased partnership between academic and private-practice radiologists. Under the leadership of Gerald D. Dodd III, MD, and Thomas B. Fletcher, MD, the task force delivered its first major report during Monday’s lunch session.

Dodd offered the disheartening results of a recently completed survey to assess the general health of academic departments around the country. Respondents cited revenue and manpower as the greatest challenges facing academic radiology, with more than half citing a critical lacking of both.

“The issue of the marginal status of our academic radiology departments is real, and the solutions to salvage our academic enterprise will not come simply from the rethinking of leadership,” Dodd cautioned the audience. “The solution must come from the nearly 27,000 practicing radiologists in this country.”

To address this critical issue, the task force offered several suggestions such as the establishment of partnership alliances between academic and private-practice radiologists on a local, regional, and statewide basis and efforts by private-practice radiologists to establish endowments, perform pro bono clinical work, or fund residency and fellowship positions in their nearby academic departments.

“The threat is real,” Fletcher cautioned in his remarks to the gathering. “We must all meet this challenge.”
Focusing on the Future of Breast Imaging

Opening the session with her presentation titled “Current Status and Future Challenges in Breast Imaging,” Carol H. Lee, MD, noted that while more than half of ACR members perform mammography, only about 10 percent call themselves “breast imagers.” This professional specialty will be further encumbered in the coming years by government regulation, financial considerations, malpractice issues, and workforce challenges, she cautioned, despite the fact that research shows that radiologists and early detection have been making a difference in breast cancer mortality the last decade.

Edward A. Sickles, MD, discussed the methods to measure and improve interpretive performance. While noting that there are plenty of federal regulations governing mammography, what the government requires radiologists to do doesn’t give them enough information to complete a thorough audit. However, he noted, the ACR, through programs such as BI-RADS®, provides radiologists with “a great deal of guidance on how to complete an audit.”

With the issue of digital mammography dominating professional headlines for much of the last year, Rita Zuley, MD, briefed attendees on how facilities can make the critical transition to digital mammography. “It is not an easy process,” Zuley cautioned, speaking from firsthand experience. “There are countless questions that must be resolved before going digital. It really requires a team approach to make this work and you must have excellent communication between the radiologists and the technologists.”

Digital imaging remained the focus of the following session as Ellen B. Mendelson, MD, spotlighted the economic considerations of “the digital era.”

“Breast imaging reimbursement remains a chronic problem,” Mendelson told the audience, a problem that she predicted would continue in the coming years, impacting concerted efforts to recruit more young radiologists into the field of breast imaging.

“The picture is bleak, but it is not hopeless,” Mendelson said. “We need to repopulate breast imaging and change the perception of breast imaging by others in radiology.”

Etta D. Pisano, MD, discussed the evolution of the use of techniques beyond mammography to screen for breast cancer. While many of the alternative techniques have shown some promise, and many of them currently are the focus of critical ACRIN® trials, there is still a lack of “overwhelming data” to support them. While mammography remains the most reliable detection method, Pisano predicted that many of these new methods likely will dominate breast imaging in the next 10 years or so.

Key ACR Strategies for Improving Your Practice’s Bottom Line

The final day of the 2006 AMCLC focused on critical business issues that face today’s radiology practices and featured a blue-ribbon panel of experts who offered their firsthand experience in these several key practice management areas.

John A. Patti, MD, chair of the ACR’s Economics Commission, opened the session with a brief overview of the economic environment for 2006.

“Imaging definitely is in the crosshairs,” Patti cautioned the audience. He cited such factors as the increased utilization rate, self-referral, the high valuation of imaging procedures, and the perceived industry profit motive as the key causes of this increased scrutiny of the imaging field.

Richard L. Duszak, MD, addressed the importance of correct coding in radiology practices, emphasizing that radiologists and their coding staffs must document the details. One critical need for all radiology practices is a well-crafted compliance plan which serves as a continuous quality improvement tool.

The topic of “Payments for Quality” was next on the agenda as Christopher P. Ullrich, MD, pointed out that while imaging costs have risen rapidly in recent years, the capabilities of medical imaging have risen as well, as has the need to be paid appropriately for these services.

Ullrich said that while radiologists can help their cause in this area through service on payer advisory committees, they...
While primarily focused on key issues of the day, the importance of research and its lasting influence on the future of radiology was a key focus of the report by both the Radiation Therapy Oncology Group and the American College of Radiology Imaging Network.

Today, RTOG® boasts more than 250 institutional members across the United States and Canada, stated RTOG® Group Chair Walter J. Curran, MD. This year, RTOG® launched 12 new studies, including the first trial in conjunction with the European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer.

The past year also has been strong for ACRIN® with 23 trials addressing the key questions that ultimately will lead to better cancer care, noted ACRIN® Network Chair Bruce J. Hillman, MD. Hillman noted that funding remains a critical issue for ACRIN®, which currently is the largest line item of the ACR budget with more than $54 million in 2005; these research funds are not derived from ACR membership dues. To help ensure ACRIN®’s continued research success, the new ACRIN® Fund for Imaging Innovation was launched this year and has been a tremendous triumph, collecting more than $7 million in donations to date.

However, Hillman said, this is just the beginning and the ACRIN® Fund needs more than the support of just a few ACR members and corporate benefactors. “ACRIN® is your research endeavor,” Hillman told the attendees.

Board Chair James P. Borgstede, MD, recognizes and thanks ACRIN® corporate sponsors for their generous donations to the ACRIN® Fund for Imaging Innovation. Tom McCausland, president and CEO of Siemens, also was thanked for his stalwart support of both ACRIN® and the ACR.
A Night of Tradition Acknowledges Careers of Honor

The issues and challenges of radiology were set aside Sunday night for the time-honored tradition of honoring those radiologists who have made significant contributions to the profession. The ACR Convocation represents the pinnacle of many radiology careers as they represent not only professional achievement, but peer recognition for 68 new ACR fellows, three honorary fellows, and three gold medalists.

This year, the College awarded its highest honor, the gold medal, to:

- Robert Campbell, MD, Haverford, Pa.
- David C. Levin, MD, Bryn Mawr, Pa.
- J. Frank Wilson, MD, Milwaukee, Wisc.

Honorary fellowships were bestowed to three internationally known radiologists:

- Ann Barrett, MD, Norfolk IP, Scotland
- Man Chung Han, MD, Seoul, Korea
- Guo-Liang Jiang, MD, Shanghai, China