

## **The Evolving Role of a Scientific Society**

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When I began my term as president of the Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma (EAST) last year, I spent some time trying to organize my thoughts about what the role of a scientific organization should be and how EAST should prepare itself to serve its mission and its membership in the new millennium.

Several years ago, Bill Schwab organized a retreat for the EAST board, its past presidents, and future leaders. The purpose of that retreat was to chart the future of the EAST organization. I took away two things from that meeting: an understanding of the EAST mission statement, and some embryonic thoughts about the role of a scientific organization.

The EAST mission is clear: to foster the careers of young trauma surgeons.

In my address today, I will provide you with some thoughts as to how EAST should evolve, maintain, and strengthen that mission to the young trauma surgeon. We will begin by examining two questions: What does a scientific organization do? And how can it do it better?

### **THE ROLE OF A SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATION**

A scientific organization does five things: (1) it provides a forum for the creation of content: scientific content, educational content, and practice management content; (2) it adjudicates the value of that content; (3) it disseminates content through its relationship with a scientific publication or at its annual meeting; (4) it encourages discourse among its members; (5) finally, a scientific organization creates products of value to the membership.

#### **A Scientific Organization as a Forum**

A scientific organization traditionally provides a forum for content by selecting like-minded individuals for membership, organizing the meeting, selecting an attractive place for the membership to congregate, and calling for abstracts. In subtle ways, however, a scientific organization, either by its structure or by its program, may also influence the thinking of the membership, the submission of future content, and ultimately, the course and practice of its discipline.

Let me give you an example. Several years ago, when Mike Rhodes was president of EAST, his presidential address described the development of practice management guidelines for trauma care. As president, he created a committee on guidelines—he changed the structure. Mike Pasquale eventually was appointed to lead that committee. Let me assure you that when this committee started in 1993, its mission was not embraced either by the regents of the American College of Surgeons or by the surgical community as a whole. Nonetheless, Dr. Pasquale and his committee persisted. The EAST organization persisted in providing a forum for his work, and now both EAST and Dr. Pasquale are recognized as leaders in the rapidly emerging field of evidence-based medicine. (Figure 1)

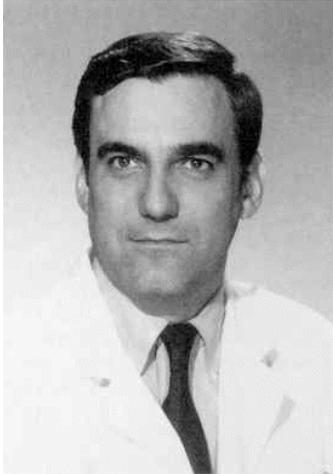


Figure 1. John A. Morris, Jr., MD: President, Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma

Dr. Rhodes and Dr. Pasquale changed the structure of the organization. They changed the thinking of surgeons, and they changed the way we are all going to practice medicine in the next decade. The challenge is to continue the process of constructive change. We must think of new and innovative forums to execute our mission.

In the last 3 years, we have seen the creation of a number of new forums: breakfast sessions, position papers, clinical courses, career courses, and, new this year, a technology fair. Although these innovations are creative and symbolic of a dynamic organization, we cannot stop here. We must think beyond the constraints of our annual meeting. The forum we create must not exist for 3 days a year; it must exist for 365 days a year. Our forum must be accessible, flexible, interactive, and dynamic.

In the next millennium, the forum that EAST creates will reside on the Internet. Will the annual meeting disappear? Emphatically, no. What will emerge is a new structure, a new forum that will bring the messages of this scientific organization to the next generation of trauma surgeons: remember the mission.

## **Adjudication of Content**

The second role of a scientific organization is to adjudicate the value of scientific content. This is the peer-review function. Abstracts, which are little more than ideas, are submitted to the program committee, in our case more than 200 per year, and the program committee ranks these ideas based on preset criteria including scientific merit, clinical relevance, and interest to the membership. It is in its role of "sorting ideas" that the program committee can exert profound leadership. The committee and, specifically, its chairman, must have sufficient vision to recognize innovative ideas and concepts and allow those ideas to be presented to the membership.

The publications committee has a very different role. Its job is to evaluate not the idea but the finished product, the manuscript. Is the manuscript well conceived and well written? Are the conclusions supported by the data, and are the conclusions worthy of inclusion in the scientific literature?

How can we make the process of adjudication better? The first way to improve the process is to make it more efficient. Time is the enemy. Time needs to be in the hands of those who are creating, not in the hands of those who are adjudicating. Second, we must work to broaden the representation of the disciplines on both the program and publication committees. As generalists, we are competing with specialty societies for the best ideas and the best manuscripts. We will only win that competition if we provide a better, user-friendlier forum for the subspecialists.

Most importantly, the process of adjudication must be perceived as educational and not judgmental. We must create methods for getting constructive criticism from the committee to the authors. To do this, we must continue to develop "products" that teach abstract and manuscript creation, products that teach scientific design, products that teach the art of grant application and contract administration. In simple terms, we must teach our members how to effectively frame and transform their ideas into well-constructed manuscripts that improve the practice of our discipline.

Finally, we must recognize that the adjudication process is not infallible. Seminal ideas may go unrecognized. Perhaps we should put all the abstracts, accepted or rejected, on the website for the entire membership to view at their convenience. This would expose the membership to potentially "overlooked" ideas and provide a forum for those ideas. We should link each abstract to the author by e-mail so that there can be a direct dialogue between the reader and the author. This would allow senior members of the organization to mentor and nurture younger members in the art of abstract construction, and it would allow the young surgeon to compare his or her work to the work of his or her peers.

## **Dissemination of Content**

The third role of a scientific organization is the dissemination of content. Traditionally, this is done under the auspices of the publications committee to a preselected journal. EAST's ability to disseminate content is expanding rapidly. We are using a multitude of forums to present content to the membership. Examples include breakfast sessions to explore difficult clinical problems and educational courses, such as the ultrasound course, to introduce new clinical technology. Practice management courses, such as the trauma center director course, present administrative and political lessons learned to a new generation of leaders. This year's inaugural technology fair is another effort to creatively disseminate content and expose the membership to the new field of information technology.

Although all of these initiatives are forward thinking, they are internally focused. The challenge to EAST in the new millennium will be to take the ideas generated by this membership and package and present them externally, indeed, globally. I can sense some of you smiling at the idea of EAST becoming a global forum. Let me remind you, however, that at the end of its first month of operation, with no hype, no advertising, and no fanfare, the EAST website was receiving more than 250 inquiries a day. Twelve percent of those were from outside North America.

## **Encouragement of Discourse**

One of the primary functions of the scientific meeting has been to encourage the exchange of ideas among its members, to encourage discourse. Traditionally, this has been in the forum of invited and floor discussions. Unfortunately, the annual meeting, although ideal for the germination of ideas, is ineffective for turning those ideas into tangible work products. Too often the enthusiasm of January becomes over-whelmed by the activities of daily living in a busy surgical practice. Geography, time zones, and the pace of our lives compound these problems. What is needed is a convenient communication tool that avoids the time sink of telephone tag, allows group communication, and is convenient but cheap. The Internet provides the ideal solution to this problem. It is cheap, time efficient (if you can type), and portable. During the past year, EAST has made a large investment in our website. We made that investment to facilitate discourse among the membership. We made that investment to turn the productivity of our annual meeting into a daily affair. We made that investment so that the ideas generated at this meeting can be turned into tangible work products, products that we can share with each other, products that will improve our practice, products that will enhance our academic careers or foster our continuing medical education. Ultimately, these products will improve the medical community and our communities at large.

Our website, under the visionary direction of Mike McGonigal, has the following operational pages: a description of the EAST organization, membership application information, and meeting and registration information. It also includes the EAST membership directory, which has name, address, phone number, and e-mail address for all EAST members. It includes the fellowship manual, which gives precise, consistent information on more than 50 programs, so that young surgeons with an interest in a trauma career can compare and determine the fellowship programs that best fulfill their needs. The website includes the EAST

program, including all the abstracts presented this year, so that members who are unable to attend the annual meeting are at least exposed to the ideas presented at the program. The website includes practice management guidelines, so that the most up-to-date information on the care of patients with blunt cardiac injury, potential cervical spine injury, colon injury, and thromboembolic disease can be incorporated into your practice.

At the conclusion of this meeting, Dr. McGonigal will add additional features, including a job-search page, which will allow the posting of faculty and staff positions at trauma centers throughout the United States; a continuing medical education calendar; and pages for the Multi-institutional Trials Committee and Violence Prevention Task Force, so that we can get their groundbreaking work into the hands of the membership and solicit ideas, comments, and criticism.

The Internet promises to profoundly change the relationship between a scientific organization and its membership. The fulfillment of that promise, however, depends on three things: your willingness to try the tool, your feedback on how to make the tool better, and EAST's ability to rapidly improve the tool. I personally encourage you to visit the website at [www.east.org](http://www.east.org) and give us your suggestions for making the content better and the structure friendlier.

## **Creation of New Products**

The final responsibility of a scientific organization is to create new products for the membership. The Careers in Trauma Committee under Mike Rotondo's leadership focused for the last 2 years on the issue of how to identify and mentor the next generation of trauma surgeons. The committee has compiled a list of 258 rising residents with an interest in trauma and has distributed the fellowship manual and a questionnaire to all of them. The committee is currently collating that data with the intermediate goal of providing a profile of residents interested in a career in trauma. Ultimately, the individual resident will be linked with a mentor from the senior membership to provide career guidance. It is a new product that remembers our mission.

What other new products can we envision? During the last 5 years, we have seen the rise of contract research organizations (CROs). Drug companies contract with CROs to enroll and supervise academic medical centers in the conduct of pharmaceutical research. Contract research is becoming a critical revenue source for trauma centers squeezed by the efficiencies of managed care and saddled with the burden of providing free care to the uninsurable. Those of you who have worked with these contract research organizations know that they do not understand the delivery of trauma care. I envision that the scientific societies of the future may well work with CROs to provide expertise in protocol development, quality assurance, and identification of appropriate participating institutions. Ultimately, a scientific organization such as EAST has the manpower, the expertise, and the resources to become the premier CRO for the trauma community.

Finally, scientific societies such as ours must assume a political and policy responsibility. EAST has begun that journey with the establishment of the Violence Prevention Task Force and the publication of its position paper. There are, however, many other issues on the political landscape that will affect our daily practice.

Howard Champion, during his EAST presidency, created the Coalition for Trauma Care, a Washington-based lobbying group headed by Dr. Marcia Mabee. EAST is a charter member of that organization. The coalition distributes timely political information to its members and seeks their support in lobbying members of Congress for trauma-related issues. We are currently exploring the possibility of putting an abridged version of this report on the EAST website and envision using the Internet to contact the EAST membership when critical trauma-related issues come before Congress. The Internet will allow us to close the loop between you and your congressional representative. It will amplify your voice. It will amplify our collective voices on Capitol Hill.

## **SUMMARY**

In summary, EAST is a very different organization today than it was 12 years ago when it was conceived in the lounge of the Washington airport. It started as a traditional scientific organization, but an organization with a very different mission. Its mission was to identify and nurture the young traumatologist and to provide that individual with the opportunity for academic advancement. The EAST of the next millennium will be different

still. The new EAST will reside on the Internet. It will provide a creative forum for scientific content, educational content, and practice content. It will adjudicate that content rapidly, equitably, and educationally. It will disseminate that content to the membership, to the trauma community, and to the community at large. It will encourage discourse, the exchange of ideas, the exchange of data, and the exchange of content. Finally, EAST will continue to meet the challenge of creating new and innovative products to foster the career of young trauma surgeons worldwide.

Will the new world be complex? Yes. Will it be possible to drown in information? Yes. Will EAST meet those challenges head on? Yes. Will we succeed? Yes. We will succeed because we will remember the mission.

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