



Presidents Report 2006

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

I was greatly honoured to serve as the President of the Spine Society of Australia during the past two years.

However, the Presidency of the SSA is not about me. It is not about accolades, authority or honours. Being the President is about responsibility to you, the membership, of the SSA. It involves enhancing the aims of the Society including promotion and provision of high quality scientific meetings and research as well as membership facilities. It also involves raising the profile of the Society. The SSA should aspire to be the peak professional body representing Spine Surgeons in Australia. Both the executive and membership of the SSA have expressed this desire and also for the SSA to be a vehicle which can influence government policy.

One of the most important aspects of leadership of any organisation is to recognise unsatisfactory circumstances or situations and to change them. The organisation must be proactive in this regard. It cannot wait for other people or organisations to reshape the world to our liking. Changing the world means changing the way we interact with other organisations and people.

To this end, we have established dialogue with Dr Russell Stitz, President of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. We have sought affiliation with the College and it has been agreed that all matters referred to the College relating to Spinal Surgery will be referred primarily to the SSA and secondarily to the NSA and AOA. In the long term affiliation may involve the development of a Post Fellowship Training Programme in Spinal Surgery. How far we progress this affiliation will depend on the opinion of our membership and the desire to influence training in our speciality.

We have also sought affiliation with the Neurosurgical Society of Australasia to improve communication between the two groups. Our incoming President, Roy Carey will advance this issue on our behalf.

During the past year, the Spine Society of Australia has also had interaction with government and in particular MSAC. Although initially not included on the committee deliberating Artificial Disc Arthroplasty, we have had belated input into the process. We have raised our profile in this regard and since this time our opinion has been sought on Non Fusion Device Technology with four of our members being included on the committee.

Since our last meeting, the SSA website has been established. The Society owes a great debt to our Secretary, Peter McCombe, who has been a driving force in its establishment. The previous communication with outside organisations and people as well as amongst ourselves can only serve to lift the profile of our Society. It is no coincidence that we have increased overseas interest and participation in our current meeting since the website was established.

The website allows membership surveys to be undertaken and there are currently surveys in relation to the Artificial Disc Arthroplasty Position Statement, Continuing Professional Development Certification and Radiological Service Provision. I urge you to visit the website regularly and to express your opinion as well as to interact with your fellow members.

The website has great potential as an educational tool. Posting of suitable educational material accessible to the public will aid in patient education and allow patients to make informed choices about their treatment. This can decrease influence of grandiose claims made on other commercial internet sites and can only serve to benefit patient care and our profile.

Australia has a long history of excellent medical research despite paucity of funds. One of the roles of the Society is to encourage research. It is my belief that the Spine Society of Australia should establish a Research Foundation. An endowment fund should be developed to fund our research programme in perpetuity. This will be a difficult task but is achievable. It is my wish to advance this concept during my final two years on the Executive.

In moving forward we must not forget our past and the considerable achievements of the Society and its members. Professor Rob Fraser has been appointed as our Society historian. We have also established the Allan Dwyer Medal and have held the inaugural Ron Beetham Memorial Lecture delivered by Professor Henry Crock.

I wish to thank all members of the Executive who have unity of purpose and who have been very supportive during my Presidential Term. Special thanks are due to two members of the Executive. Bruce McPhee, our Scientific Secretary, who will also conclude his term at this meeting has been inspirational in his role. He has improved the quality of abstracts submitted for the Meeting and the quality of presentations. He has had many innovative ideas and in particular in relation to the poster session whereby the posters are able to be presented before the meeting with a maximum of eight slides. In other meetings, posters are a poor cousin to podium presentations.

Secondly, I would like to thank our Secretary, Peter McCombe, who has been inspirational. He has advanced the cause of our Society and has been the driving force behind the establishment of a superb website. The increased profile of our organisation has led to a markedly increased work load for the Secretary and I believe that this work load is becoming too much for a single person. Secretarial assistance will need to be provided in the future.

I would also like to thank the Conference Organiser, Taylored Images, and the Audio Visual Co-Ordinator, Mark Stevens, for their excellent work.

Finally, I welcome Roy Carey to his new role as President of our Society. I leave the Society in his very capable hands. I wish Roy every success in his forthcoming Presidency.

I thank you for the honour and privilege of being your President for the past two years.

Dr Ian Farey
President Spine Society Australia