



# Presidents Report 2007

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been my pleasure, privilege and honour to have served as your President for the past year.

This has been a busy year for our Society.

From its informal origin as the Facet Club, we have now evolved into a robust multidisciplinary group involving not only surgeons, but other physicians, radiologists and scientists.

This diversity is the strength of our Society.

The Spine Society is well positioned now to provide members with top quality scientific meetings, research and travel support, and over the last year has exerted increasing influence on government and para-government agencies.

Above all however, I hope that the spirit of fellowship and fun in this group is regarded as highly as the quality of our science, and to this end I record the inaugural Bleedslow Trophy fought at Royal Hobart Golf Course on Friday morning between teams from Australia and New Zealand.

As evidence of the Spine Society's growing profile, we are now in the happy situation where the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) and Medical Benefits Consultative Council (MBCC) regard us along with the Neurosurgical Society (NSA) and

the Australian Society of Orthopaedic Surgeons (ASOS) as a “go-to” group in deliberations on spinal procedures, implants and the like.

During 2006 the Spine Society was eventually involved in MBCC discussion on Disc Arthroplasty, having been excluded from the initial MSAC process of evaluation. Our lobbying has not only resulted in our Society being requested to provide appropriate data on Disc Arthroplasty as and when it occurs, but an assurance that we will be involved in any future similar deliberations.

The MSAC process on Non-Fusion Implants remains stalled despite our best efforts.

We have been asked by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and the Department of Health and Ageing to contribute to an upcoming review of Spine Surgery items both in the Orthopaedic and Neurosurgical sections of the Medical Benefits Schedule. We will involve you, the membership, as we proceed but if any of you have strong feelings about item descriptors or reimbursements, I would be grateful if you would get in touch with me directly or record your thoughts on the website.

The Spine Society will contribute along with the NSA and the ASOS. Gary Speck, one of our Executive, is National President of the ASOS so we are doubly represented!

Many of you would be aware that the Spine Society has contributed to the current review on provision of radiology services and in particular on the provision of appropriate quality imaging upon which diagnosis and treatment can be based.

We along with the AOA and the ASOS amongst others have written to the President of the Royal Australasian College of Radiologists requesting direction to their members. This matter remains unresolved.

My predecessor, Ian Farey, met with RACS President Russell Stitz to discuss a closer association of the Spine Society with the College. The aim was to eventually be directly involved with post-fellowship training in spinal surgery.

I may now report that in a discussion with Russell Stitz some weeks ago he conveyed his desire to set in place a post-fellowship qualification in spinal surgery, through the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

This exciting initiative would involve entry to a post-fellowship spinal surgical training scheme via the orthopaedic or neurosurgical programs.

A two year training period would be followed by the provision of a post-fellowship degree.

I was involved in a teleconference with College and other specialty group members 17.4.2007, and whilst this project is embryonic it is extremely exciting and something which many members of this Society have been working towards.

I note that one of our members, Andrew Sutherland is the next President of the RACS so with he as President and Russell Stitz continuing on the RACS Board, I would anticipate productive discussion and a positive outcome.

Your Executive has reconvened the Training Programme in Spinal Surgery in Australia Sub-Committee and its two existing members, Bruce McPhee and Richard Vaughan, have been instructed to co-opt other appropriate members to meet with representatives of RACS to advance this process.

Our affiliation with the Australian Orthopaedic Association and changes to its Board structure have meant that I, as President of the Spine Society of Australia, now sit on the Board of the AOA as a speciality group director.

It is fair to say that at present difficult times are being experienced by the Board of the AOA. The President and First-Vice President are shortly to face an Extraordinary General Meeting at which motions have been put to dismiss both of them from the Board.

I feel uneasy about my position on this Board but hopefully a satisfactory resolution can be found at this EGM on 19 May 2007.

The Society has continued to seek a closer association with the Neurosurgical Society. At best we have achieved a lukewarm response, but perhaps this is understandable in that neither party knows quite what it wants from such an association. We will continue to pursue this as your Executive thinks it is important, and is highly likely to be beneficial to both bodies, especially if we are together involved in post-fellowship surgical training.

As to research and travel, it is a source of some disappointment to our Executive that the DePuy Travelling Fellowship has not been taken up in the manner expected. It is extremely important that this and other research monies are used as we do not wish the funding to reduce or worse still to be withdrawn. You should address questions and concerns to our Scientific Secretary, Owen Williamson.

Our Annual Meeting has continued to improve in content and presentation. The Scientific Secretary has informed you all via his report in the meeting handbook as to changes made in the assessment of papers. Hopefully this will lead to a further increase in quality. We owe thanks to Owen and his fellow reviewers, Mark Percy and Adrian Nowitzke.

Declarations of Interest for speakers were long overdue and are now required.

The number of papers and posters offered this year indicates that the Executive should think of increasing the length of the Meeting to accommodate these extra contributions but not at the expense of quality.

I trust members understand the reasons for the Executive's recommendations as to sites for further meetings.

The Spine Society is as ever indebted to the Industry for its involvement in our Meeting and in particular for its financial involvement. Our Executive this year was concerned about the reduced presence of Industry and in particular concerned about reduced sponsorship in regards to important parts of the Meeting – especially for audiovisual support.

Last night's Dinner, supported by B Braun is the first awarded on an "exclusive sponsorship" basis as decided by Executive, and we thank B Braun for its involvement.

Our Meeting has attracted many outstanding guests over the years and I thank Peter McCombe and Wayne Taylor for gathering details of our previous Meetings and guest speakers which appear to the rear of the Conference Book.

We have been extraordinarily favoured this year by my Presidential Guest, Eugene Carragee, an absolute super "A" Grade contributor and performer.

Similarly the Executive is overjoyed that our own John O'Brien has returned from Ireland to deliver the second Ron Beetham Memorial Lecture. This named lecture was an initiative of the Executive in 2006. I note that details of

Ron Beetham and his contributions to spinal orthopaedics can be found at the front of the Meeting Program.

The Executive has recorded its sorrow at the death of Alf Nachemson, and on behalf of the Spine Society of Australia I have sent a letter of sympathy to Alf's wife and family. I understand the Bone & Joint Decade Meeting to follow the AOA ASM in October 2007 has been named in his honour. The SSA will contribute speakers.

As I said at the beginning of this talk, the Spine Society of Australia is an evolving organisation with a rapidly increasing profile.

I now record my personal thanks to all Members of the Executive, and in particular Peter McCombe, as Secretary and Bill Sears as Treasurer, those with far more responsible and important roles than my own.

As the workload of Executive Members increases, particularly the Secretary and Treasurer, questions of appropriate reimbursement have arisen.

I am happy that the issue of reimbursement to the Secretary and Treasurer of the Spine Society has been satisfactorily resolved.

Our Society should record its thanks to Nigel Jones who is retiring this year after fourteen years on the Executive and is a Past President. I convey my own personal thanks to Nigel for this wise counsel and his unique ability to make seemingly complicated matters simple.

Peter McCombe retires as Secretary of the Spine Society this year.

His contribution to this Society has been enormous, in particular he has been responsible for the introduction of our website. We are lucky that he

continues on the Executive for a further year until taking over as President in Adelaide in 2008.

Thanks to Gordon Howie who retires as Chairman of the Membership Committee.

Other sub-committee positions have fallen vacant and not only is the Executive bound to ensure that these positions are filled, but may well approach some of our younger members to become involved.

Finally I would like to thank Rob Moore and his staff in Adelaide for continuing to function as the Secretariat and “spiritual centre” of the Society.

Ladies and Gentlemen the Spine Society of Australia faces an exciting and challenging future!

I thank you all for your attention and invite you all to enjoy the remainder of our meeting.

Roy Carey  
President Spine Society Australia  
22April 2007