

AANS/CNS Section on Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery and American Society for Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery

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From the President

Health Care Reform and the End of Narcissism



Philip A. Starr, MD, PhD

In future cultural histories of the United States, the years from 1970 to the present may well be referred to as the “Age of Narcissism.” A large body of recent literature has focused on narcissism and raised alarms among contemporary thinkers (reviewed in [1]). In classical psychoanalysis, narcissism reflects an inability to distinguish the self from others (2). Although many have speculated on the cultural causes of narcissism, one explanation may lie in the emergence of secular materialism as the dominant philosophical construct of our time. This construct holds that the nature of reality is to be found solely in the material world. Failing philosophically to address man’s search for meaning (3), a consequence of secular materialism can be a primitive retreat into the self. A familiar attitudinal corollary of narcissism is entitlement: the view that one deserves something unconditionally, regardless of its effect on others (or its effect on the persons paying for it) (1).

In this context, the United States is now engaged in a debate about the future direction of our health care system. Among physicians’ groups, including surgical specialists, an attitude of entitlement is evident in thinking about the role of government in health care. We expect a large sum of taxpayer funded income in our professional fees (a phenomenon that is fairly recent in the long history of medicine), but we are disturbed that anyone would consider reducing publically funded payment as one part of plans to tackle unsustainable government debt. We reflect a larger society that feels entitled to the fruits of taxation but is unwilling to pay those taxes, an

attitude evident in the now famous oxymoron seen on a sign at a “Tea Party” political rally: “Get your government hands off my Medicare!”

Physicians have thus far missed an opportunity to have an effective voice in combating another pervasive feature of the Age of Narcissism, the “culture of blame and compensation” (4) represented in our system of torts. Organized medicine should have had tort reform as its top priority for congressional leaders crafting health care reform. Instead, preoccupied with reversing impending cuts in Medicare physician payments, the American Medical Association abandoned tort reform to focus on Medicare-related income. Meanwhile, the influence of the surgical specialties in the reform debate is diminished by a reflexive, inwardly focused reaction to all aspects of reform from a standpoint of “what’s in it for us, now?” To reduce our regulatory burden long-term, shouldn’t we be trying to decrease, not increase, our reliance on the American taxpayer?

Are we destined to continue on this pathway? Some optimistic contemporary philosophers see signs of an impending cultural shift. After 40 years of the Age of Narcissism, it is increasingly apparent that the gratification of narcissism is temporary and inevitably fails to produce genuine happiness. More conducive to well-being is a sense of gratitude and devotion to service (5). Polls suggest that young adults are hungry for service and recognize, as most spiritual traditions have long taught, that personal happiness can only be found in service to others (1). What can surgical specialists do to regain cultural leadership in this area? In facing our challenges, we can reject entitlement, and instead cultivate gratitude for our many blessings: the skills we have been taught, the wide array of therapies we now have to offer to our patients, and the fact that our

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ASSFN Meeting in New York City, June 13-16, 2010

Michael Schulder, MD

The upcoming ASSFN biennial meeting is dedicated to the rapidly growing specialty of stereotactic and functional neurosurgery. The 2010 meeting welcomes honored guest lecturer (and ASSFN past president) David W. Roberts, MD, from Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, and also features an invited lecture by Paul Greengard, a 2000 Nobel Prize winner from Rockefeller University. New this year is a premeeting practical course, Deep Brain Stimulation for Movement Disorders, for neurologists, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants. And, because of high interest at the 2008 meeting, breakfast sessions will once again be offered. This year's topics are Cell Transplantation; Neural Prostheses; and Consciousness: Disorders and Surgical Treatment.

Our meeting venue, the New York Marriott Downtown, is located in the midst of one of America's most fascinating areas—old New York. Among the steel-and-concrete canyons of the Wall Street area there are many sites that remain from the colonial era, representing some of the earliest urban settlements in North America. Looking to the future, the rebuilding of the World Trade Center is taking place near our hotel. We hope you will come and enjoy the sights and sounds of downtown New York, a locale that visitors and New Yorkers alike will want to explore. Our scientific and social programs will be outstanding, so rest assured this meeting of the ASSFN is an event you cannot afford to miss!

Meeting details, including a link to the meeting brochure, are readily available at www.assfn.org/newyork2010.asp.

From the President *continued from page 1*

professional compensation, even assuming inevitable changes in the future, will still put us well into the top 1 percent of American earners. We can teach and model these attitudes for our trainees. And when health care reform is reconsidered in 2010, we can return to an old tradition in medicine, advocacy for values that are larger than the self.

References

1. Twenge JM, Campbell WK: The Narcissism Epidemic. New York: Free Press, 2009
2. Sandler J, Person ES, Fonagy P: Freud's "On Narcissism: an Introduction." New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991
3. Frankl, VE: Man's Search for Meaning. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006 (reprinted)
4. Simpson, J: Touching the Void. New York: Harper and Row, 1989
5. Emmons RA, McCullough ME: The Psychology of Gratitude. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004

2010 AANS Meeting Highlights

The 2010 AANS Annual Meeting will take place May 1–5 in Philadelphia, Pa. As part of the meeting, the Stereotactic and Functional Section will have two sessions, one on Monday, May 3, from 2:15 to 5:15 p.m., and another on Tuesday, May 4, from 2:45 to 5:30 p.m.

The Monday session will be moderated by Philip A. Starr, MD, PhD. This session will focus on innovations in the diagnosis, management and treatment of stereotactic and functional neurosurgery. Innovations which have been developed in the last 12 months will be presented. The Monday program is listed at www.aans.org/annual/2010/pdfs/Monday.pdf. A Monday evening course, Introduction to Stereotactic Neurosurgery, is intended for neurosurgeons interested in learning general radiobiologic principles and clinical strategies. Details are available at www.aans.org/annual/2010/pdfs/evening%20course.pdf.

The Tuesday session will be moderated by Aviva Abosch, MD, PhD, and Michael G. Kaplitt, MD, PhD. It is jointly sponsored by the AANS/CNS Stereotactic and Functional Section and by the Pediatric Section. Topics will include: Surgical Treatment of Pediatric Epilepsy; Overview of Movement Disorders Surgery in Children; and Deep Brain Stimulation in Secondary Dystonia. The Tuesday session is listed at www.aans.org/annual/2010/pdfs/Tuesday.pdf.

2009 CNS Meeting Meeting Highlights

The 2009 CNS Annual Meeting took place Oct. 24–29 in New Orleans, La. As part of the meeting, the Stereotactic and Functional Section planned the following presentations. A session on stereotactic and functional neurosurgery with presentation of oral papers and selected posters took place on Monday, Oct. 26, an interactive medical learning, or IML, session dedicated to stereotactic and functional neurosurgery was held on Tuesday, Oct. 27, and a special seminar, Socioeconomic Factors in Functional and Stereotactic Neurosurgery, took place on Wednesday, Oct. 28.

On Tuesday afternoon there was an IML session entitled Anterior Temporal Lobectomy vs. Selective Amygdalohippocampectomy: Is There an Advantage in Seizure or Neuropsychological Outcomes? The experts were G. Rees Cosgrove, MD, and Nicholas M. Barbaro, MD, while the moderators were Guy M. McKhann II, MD, Robert E. Gross, MD, Emad N. Eskandar, MD, Kathryn L. Holloway, MD, and W. Jeffrey Elias, MD. This was a lively and well-received session that included presentation of different clinical case scenarios, a review of the most pertinent literature, and discussion by the experts with interactive polling and questions from the audience. Based on the available data there was no firm recommendation regarding the superiority of one approach versus the other.

There was also an excellent Wednesday afternoon session entitled Socioeconomic Factors in Functional and Stereotactic Neurosurgery. The moderators were Michael G. Kaplitt, MD, and Aviva Abosch, MD. Among the topics reviewed were How Much Does Reimbursement Affect DBS Technique?, The Economics of Functional Neurosurgery in the United States, and Congressional Outlook for 2010.

There was a social reception for residents and fellows. This was a very informal event and a great opportunity for current and prospective fellows to learn more about functional neurosurgery.

Application for New Membership



American Society for Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery

Name _____

Office Address _____

City _____ State _____ Country _____

Phone _____ Fax _____ E-mail _____

Residency Training Program _____ Years: _____

Medical School _____

Specialty (circle) Neurosurgery Neurology Other: _____

AANS Member Yes No CNS Member Yes No

Interests in Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery: (please circle)

Movement Disorders Pain Epilepsy Psychosurgery
Biomedical Engineering Tumors Radiosurgery Image Guidance

Determine and circle your membership category:

Category	Yearly Fee	Description
Active	\$325	For practicing neurosurgeons in the United States or Canada who have completed residency/fellowship
Resident/Fellow	\$25	One-time fee (not yearly). For neurosurgical trainees currently in residency or fellowship
Senior	Free	For neurosurgeons who are retired and over 65 years old
Associate	\$50	For non-neurosurgeons

The benefits of Active membership include:

- Membership in the AANS/CNS Section on Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery
- Membership in the World Society for Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery
- Reduced fees for the biennial ASSFN meetings
- Subscription to the journal *Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery* (including online access)

The benefits of all other membership categories are:

- Membership in the AANS/CNS Section on Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery
- Reduced fees for the biennial ASSFN meetings
- Eligibility to subscribe to the journal *Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery* (including online access) at the reduced rate of \$135. If you are joining the ASSFN as a Resident/Fellow, Associate, or Senior member and wish to have the journal subscription, send a check for \$135, payable to AANS, directly to our secretariat at the AANS. Mail to: ASSFN, c/o AANS, 5550 Meadowbrook Drive, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008, and check this box:
 YES, I would like to receive the society journal at the reduced rate.

There are two ways to become an ASSFN member:

(1) Apply online at www.MyAANS.org (for Active member applications only), or (2) mail this application form and a check for the appropriate fee (see table above), payable to ASSFN, to: ASSFN, c/o AANS, 5550 Meadowbrook Drive, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008.

For questions or concerns, contact the current (2008–2010) treasurer, Konstantin Slavin, at kslavin@uic.edu, or the membership chair, Kelly Foote, at foote@neurosurgery.ufl.edu.

ASSFN–AANS/CNS Section on Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery

5550 Meadowbrook Drive
Rolling Meadows, Illinois 60008

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Upcoming Meeting Calendar

The section is very excited about the upcoming ASSFN meeting in New York City. This promises to be an outstanding meeting that covers the most current topics in this exciting and rapidly changing field.

One of the purposes of this newsletter is to inform all ASSFN members about upcoming meetings and conferences of interest. The future meeting organizers are encouraged to contact the newsletter editor, Emad Eskandar, MD, with information regarding each such meeting.

2010 78th Annual Meeting of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons

Philadelphia, Pa.
May 1–5, 2010
www.aans.org

2010 Biennial Meeting of the ASSFN

Save the date!
New York, N.Y.
June 13–16, 2010
www.assfn.org/

2010 CNS Meeting

San Francisco, Calif.
Oct. 16–21
www.cns.org