



American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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It is with a deep sense of humility that I today take over the presidency of the AASM, knowing that I follow in the footsteps of many of the most distinguished leaders of our profession. On a personal note, you have heard that I was born and educated outside North America. I would like to express my gratitude to the United States and the Academy, whose ideals allow someone from a different background and culture to achieve positions of highest leadership. I am grateful to my teachers of Neurology in South Africa as well as mentors in Sleep Medicine such as John Shepard, Peter Hauri, Mark Mahowald and the late Michael Aldrich.

We are a sufficiently young specialty that our early origins are still within the memory of some of our members. I personally remember the chill down my spine on hearing the Father of Sleep Medicine, Nathaniel Kleitman, speak at the 1995 APSS meeting in Nashville. Many here today have personally experienced the major steps in the growth of our field and continue to contribute their wisdom and experience. I hope to serve with this sense of history having been made and continuing to be created by us all.

We can feel a sense of achievement in contemplating where we stand today. We have 5,600 individual and more than 800 center members and over 5,000 people will be attending this Sleep 2006 20th anniversary meeting of the APSS. Sleep Medicine has been recognized as an independent specialty by some of the most powerful groups in medicine – the American Board of Medical Specialties, the Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education, the American Medical Association, the Institute of Medicine and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Public awareness of sleep, sleep deprivation and sleep disorders is at an all time high.

However, this success has led to new challenges, which we need to address with clear goals, wise judgment and united thinking. I remind you of the vision statement of the Academy: The American Academy of Sleep Medicine is the leader in setting standards and promoting excellence in sleep medicine health care, education and research. We need to keep clearly focused on our strategic goals: continued and increasing recognition of

Sleep Medicine as a unitary specialty with practitioners from many backgrounds united in a single interdisciplinary field; meeting the needs of our members and our patients by developing high professional standards and advocating for superb quality patient care by trained sleep physicians; providing education in sleep and its disorders to technologists, medical students, physicians and other health care workers and to the public; fostering research which will eventually lead to easier diagnosis and better therapy for sleep disorders; and evolving the AASM to better serve its members and to stand as the national representative organization of sleep specialists. We need to remain true to our vision and our goals.

To do this, we will need to interact with many other organizations. We will do this in a collegial and cooperative manner, working together when we feel it meets our interests and respectfully disagreeing when our goals differ. However, we will keep always in mind that the AASM is the national society representing clinical sleep specialists. We will not abrogate this role to any other group and will seek to be recognized as such in as many national forums as possible. Under the enlightened leadership we have been privileged to experience, the AASM has developed a reputation for honest and ethical behavior, uninfluenced by outside forces. This has led to us being widely respected and I pledge to continue to enhance this reputation of the Academy.

Following these general principles, I would like to focus on a few areas of particular importance in the coming year.

In recent years the AASM has concentrated its educational efforts at the level of physicians in training and in practice. An area where more work is needed is education at the undergraduate medical school level. I have introduced an ambitious new initiative with the goal of ensuring that Sleep Medicine is formally taught in every Medical School in North America.

The purposes behind this initiative are to ensure that all physicians commencing their careers are conscious of sleep as a health imperative for themselves, their patients and society; to ensure that physicians at the start of their careers are taught how to take a sleep history and to identify and treat common sleep disorders; to make young physicians aware of the existence of Sleep Specialists to whom they may refer patients with complex sleep disorders; and to attract some of the brightest young physicians completing medical school to consider the attractions of Sleep Medicine as a career.

To achieve this, I have already taken two steps: first, the American Sleep Medicine Foundation has joined the American Association of Medical Colleges, the premier organization of medical schools and medical specialties. Second, I have appointed a Presidential Committee on Medical School Education with the mandate of producing pragmatic curricula in Sleep Medicine for Medical Schools and advising on their implementation. I am grateful to Clete Kushida for agreeing to chair this committee and to the other distinguished members with years of experience in teaching medical students who have agreed to serve.

Under the strategic goal of enhancing Sleep Medicine as an independent specialty, the AASM will be working towards increasing the number of sleep fellowship programs accredited by ACGME. The Fellowship Training Committee has been tasked to investigate factors that hinder existing AASM accredited programs transitioning into ACGME accreditation and to suggest remedies. We will also encourage participation in the new ABMS examination in Sleep Medicine.

Under the strategic goal of meeting professional and patient needs, I am committed to the completion of the new AASM scoring manual as soon as possible. This project, ably chaired by Con Iber, will I believe be a major step forward in standardization and ease of scoring sleep studies. We will work towards fair reimbursement for all Sleep Specialists, regardless of primary specialty and to link reimbursement to accreditation and certification. We will continue to produce evidence-based practice parameters and to advise private and public payers on reimbursement guidelines. We shall continue to support, develop and protect the sleep technology profession, both in education and by intervention in legislation.

In the coming year we intend to take a leadership role in the controversial field of portable monitoring. The AASM has already released an interim statement on the subject which you can find on our website. We have appointed a task force under the chair of Nancy Collop to look at indications and optimal methods for performing portable monitoring. We have joined with the ATS and the ACCP to sponsor a research conference on portable monitoring. Together with the American Sleep Medicine Foundation, we will be proposing an RFP for a large study comparing outcomes using portable and laboratory based monitoring for the diagnosis of sleep apnea. In these ways we hope to provide an objective and unbiased approach to this topic.

In addition to the Medical School initiative, we will continue education by supplying CME on Sleep Medicine, with a wide variety of courses offered. We will continue our public education campaigns in selected areas, especially emphasizing the availability of sleep specialists for patients with sleep disorders.

We recognize the need to promote an increase in research in sleep science and sleep medicine. The NIH, and especially National Center for Sleep Disorders Research, has made many significant contributions in this area. Together with our partner organization, the Sleep Research Society, we will encourage the NIH in these times of reduced budgets to continue, and wherever possible increase, its commitment to our field. We will work with our foundation, the ASMF, to provide appropriate and meaningful research grants to new and experienced investigators.

Our final strategic goal is to develop the organization to meet the needs of all of you. In the last year, we reorganized the Section Structure. The Board is committed to making this new structure meaningful and to allowing the subareas of our field to develop. I will be working closely with the new chair of the Membership Sections Committee, Lois Krahn, to ensure that there is a direct route of communication between section leadership and the Board of Directors.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to our devoted and hard working staff. Our executive-director, Jerry Barrett, provides strong experienced leadership, both in day-to-day organization as well as in strategic planning. Our current strong financial position and our influential national reputation are to a large extent due to his foresight and wisdom. I must also thank our assistant executive-director, Jennifer Markannen, for her amazing efficiency, organizational skills and multi-tasking abilities. I cannot mention others by name, but deeply appreciate the roles of senior and junior staff in making the AASM the premier organization it is.

I look forward to the activities and challenges of the next year. As President, I hope to serve your needs, enhance our profession, and be mindful of the burdens that sleep disorders pose for our patients. We need to work together to provide, in the words of John Keats, “sleep full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.”