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The Section on Neurological Surgery (SONS) of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) was founded in 1998 to create a forum in which neurosurgeons and pediatricians could converse on a national level. For the 40 or so neurosurgeons who were Specialty Fellows of the AAP at that time, the attraction of participation had been the opportunity for collegial association with pediatricians and other pediatric subspecialists and for support of the AAP’s work to improve the health of children. In the 8 years that followed the SONS has doubled in membership, and its mission has crystallized around the three dimensions of the mission of the AAP itself: education, quality, and advocacy. As advancement of the clinical practice of pediatric neurosurgery is not one of its missions, the SONS does not have an annual scientific meeting, so it must grasp other opportunities to communicate with its membership and with the larger neurosurgical community. The Editorial Board of the Journal of Neurosurgery: Pediatrics has therefore graciously agreed again this year to publish the SONS Annual Report.

Membership

There are 81 current Specialty Fellow members in the SONS. The current members of the Executive Committee are listed in the Appendix. The following are requirements for Specialty Fellowship in the AAP and membership in the SONS: 1) certification by the American Board of Neurological Surgery (or Fellowship in the Royal College of Surgeons of Canada as a neurosurgeon); and 2) certification by either the American Board of Pediatric Neurological Surgery or a practice whose population comprises more than 75% infants, children, and adolescents as demonstrable by a case log.

There is a Candidate Fellow status available to surgeons in pediatric neurosurgical practice who are not yet certified by the American Board of Neurological Surgery, and there is a Post-Residency Training Fellow status for trainees in accredited pediatric neurosurgical fellowships. The SONS pays AAP dues for fellowship trainees.

There are no dues for membership in the SONS, but annual dues for Specialty Fellows in the AAP are expensive. The burden of dues has been a cause of some discontent, particularly among the surgical subspecialty sections of the AAP, whose members have not derived the same value from the benefits of membership as general pediatricians. Recently these grievances have been addressed, at least in part, by a kickback arrangement that returns a fraction of surgical subspecialty members’ dues to the subspecialty sections. This arrangement has allowed the SONS to suspend discussion of additional section dues, despite the modesty of its financial reserves, and it will provide support for a variety of initiatives that members hopefully will judge to be of value to them, as discussed later.

Education

The principal venue for continuing medical education (CME) for pediatricians is the annual National Conference and Exhibition (NCE), and the NCE is the principal opportunity for subspecialty sections, like the SONS, to participate in the education of their colleagues in pediatrics. Development of the program for the NCE is a competitive and political process. Subspecialty sections solicit ideas for topics from their members and transform these ideas into written proposals that are then evaluated by the NCE Program Group. The Program Group has complete discretion to edit proposals, combine similar proposals, and assign different faculty to proposals based on past program evaluations, perceived educational needs of general pediatric registrants, and budgetary considerations. Acceptance of 50% of submitted proposals is considered very good by most sections’ CME subcommittees, but the process is frustrating for the drafters of the other 50%. Recent presentations sponsored by the SONS are listed in Table 1.

There are many other opportunities for educational outreach to pediatricians, such as 4- and 5-day live CME programs at resort destinations and a selection of subscription digital offerings. The SONS nominates a contributing editor to AAP Grand Rounds, which is a monthly review of selected subspecialty literature for general pediatricians. The AAP has an active publishing operation, and it has recently
acquired the rights to a textbook of primary care pediatrics, of which it intends to publish a second edition. Subspecialty sections, including the SONS, will be tasked with rewriting the chapters that lie within the section members’ fields of expertise. On a rotating basis the SONS submits a manuscript for the “Focus on the Subspecialties” column in the monthly tabloid, AAP News. Topics covered in this column have included advances in brain tumor therapy, prevention of abusive head injury, the Chiari malformation, and management of posthemorrhagic hydrocephalus among premature infants.

Pediatric surgical subspecialists have perceptions of the educational needs of pediatricians that are not necessarily congruent with pediatricians’ perceptions of their own needs. Both points of view are valid, but the latter has dominated the CME planning process in the AAP. In this coming year the SONS will be cooperating with the Education Committee of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons/Congress of Neurological Surgeons (AANS/CNS) Section on Pediatric Neurological Surgery (Dr. Paul Steinbok, Chairperson) in a survey to document the neurosurgical perspectives on common knowledge deficits among pediatricians that affect patient care. What conditions are referred unnecessarily? What conditions are overlooked? What preliminary diagnostic studies are done that should not be done, and what are left undone that should be done? These data will be very useful for planning educational initiatives with AAP leadership, and they may also have bearing on medical school and postgraduate training curricula.

Quality

The work of the AAP to articulate quality in the practice of pediatric medicine and surgery is recorded in official “Clinical Practice Guidelines,” “Clinical Reports,” “Technical Reports,” and “Policy Statements.” Although any individual or group within the AAP can propose a topic for an official statement, most such documents are created through the committee system. Committees are small working groups appointed by the Board of Directors expressly for development of topical statements, which are then subjected to thorough review by pertinent subspecialty sections and other stakeholders within the organization before adoption by the Board. The AAP website offers a searchable library of official statements (http://aappublications.org/). Official AAP statements are features of the landscape of pediatric neurosurgical practice, touching on such topics as traumatic brain injury, child abuse, plagiocephaly, congenital and developmental spine conditions, and many aspects of injury prevention. Pediatric neurosurgeons would do well to be familiar with them.

Care of Trauma Victims

Definition of quality in the care of trauma victims has for decades been the purview of the American College of Surgeons (ACS), and despite the status of trauma as the leading cause of death and disability in childhood, the AAP has had very limited institutional engagement with it. The Board of Directors is reconsidering its historical reticence in response to a resolution approved at the 2005 Annual Leadership Forum calling for the formation of a Committee on Trauma. At the time of this writing the Board has been considering the Committee on Trauma Resolution for 15 months. The formation of a new committee entails a commitment of funds for travel and administrative support, but whether conservative stewardship of resources explains the Board’s extremely deliberate approach to this issue is uncertain. The Board may be reluctant to involve the AAP in the complex mix of professional and governmental entities that are already actively engaged with trauma care. There is ambivalence among surgical subspecialists within the AAP as well, some of whom believe that the existing structure in the keeping of the ACS is already meeting the needs of children adequately. The SONS has participated vigorously in the AAP’s internal discussions, and its Executive Committee welcomes the perspectives of other neurosurgeons on this matter.

Quality Measures

The most important current quality initiative of the AAP is the Alliance for Pediatric Quality (APQ). The APQ is a cooperative effort undertaken by the AAP, the American Board of Pediatrics, the National Association for Children’s Hospitals and Related Institutions, and the Child Health Corporation of America “...to ensure that national efforts to improve the quality of health care take into account the needs of children.” The motivation for the APQ is the paucity of valid and useful quality measures in pediatric healthcare and the concern that government and the insurance industry may step into this void if providers do not exercise leadership. It leverages the administrative expertise and data collection capacities of the National Association for Children’s Hospitals and Related Institutions and the Child Health Corporation of America, and the physician expertise of the American Board of Pediatrics and the AAP. Quality in pediatric surgical care will be a major focus of the APQ, and among the four partnering organizations only the AAP can bring pediatric surgical subspecialists to the table. The surgical subspecialty sections have been asked to designate