

RF Chair's Spring 2010 Message

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We Need You!



Originally published July 6, 1916, as the cover of Leslie's Weekly titled "What Are You Doing for Preparedness?", this portrait of "Uncle Sam" went on to become, according to James Montgomery Flagg (its creator), "the most famous poster in the world." More than four million copies of this image were printed and used extensively to motivate American support for both World War I and II.

Close to 95 years later, our nation is undergoing a different type of war, one centered on rising medical costs and the uninsured. How the recent passage of health care reform legislation will affect the practice of medicine, especially as it pertains to pathology, is still anyone's guess. But this isn't the first time that the stroke of a legislative pen has caused vast changes in how we practice our profession (i.e. CLIA '88) and it certainly won't be the last. Regardless of your support for or against the bill, the changes are inevitable and will affect us all.

The College of American Pathologists (CAP) has been actively working on Capitol Hill to provide a voice for pathologists; especially in regard to our role in future health-care delivery models (i.e. patient-centered medical homes and pay-for-performance initiatives). Touting our diagnostic knowledge and experience as central to the evolution of personalized health care, the College is emphasizing our ability to drive efficient allocation of limited resources to the maximum benefit of our patients.

Through a well-planned and thoroughly executed gauge of public opinion, the CAP recently initiated a series of quantitative and qualitative surveys to understand the current perception of our profession among target audiences, including CAP members, non-pathologist physicians, legislative influentials, and health-engaged Americans.

What they found:

CAP Members:

- 70% believe that transformation of the specialty is very important
- 9 in 10 believe that improving the image of the specialty among all audiences is important
- Members who are involved with the CAP have a higher readiness for change

Non-Pathologist Physicians:

- Satisfaction with pathologist services is strong, although, personal relationships with pathologists are more limited
- Pathology services = a report; very few regularly consult directly with pathologists

Legislative Influentials:

- Nearly everyone in Washington is supportive of making it easier for doctors to work together to deliver the best care for individual patients
- They also support the fostering of scientific breakthroughs that will deliver more personal diagnoses to individual patients

Health-Engaged Americans:

- Most have a minimal understanding of the level of pathologists' involvement in their care
- Majority does not associate either diagnosis or treatment decisions with pathologists—they believe it is the doctor who ordered the test who is responsible.

These results are not surprising, but do affirm the massive work ahead of us to clearly define our capabilities within our profession, as well as to our non-pathologist colleagues, bureaucrats, and the general public.

WE NEED YOU!

The above poster could easily read “We Need You,” because more than ever, our profession and the patients we serve need your voice to be heard. Our College needs your concrete ideas to drive our transformation efforts and evolve our profession to maintain relevancy and competitiveness in an ever-changing health care system. Our non-pathologist physicians need your diagnostic expertise, especially in emerging fields such as molecular testing, to help them decide the right treatment for our patients. Our legislature needs your story to clarify our role in patient care and position ourselves appropriately within the medical home.

HOW CAN I HELP?

Here are a few examples:

- Identify innovative ways that your residency or fellowship program has uniquely integrated pathology services in patient care.
- Converse with your clinical colleagues (trainees and attendings) about their thoughts on how we can be more helpful to the treatment of our patients. Discuss our efforts to transform our specialty and inquire about ways that we may bring increased value to the healthcare team.
- Initiate discussions with your departmental colleagues (trainees and attendings) about ways to bring efficiency to the practice of medicine, especially as it pertains to personalized medicine and bio-informatics.
- Engage your non-medical family/friends about their views of our profession and their interest in having increased access to our knowledge and diagnostic expertise.
- Attend the Fall Residents Forum meeting at CAP '10, held in Chicago, and express your thoughts and experiences. We hope to bring concrete ideas of transformation to this meeting and will need your help in broadening our agenda.

Want more information on how to get involved? Contact [me](#) or CAP staff [Jan Glas](#) for more information.

Have an idea? Visit the [CAP Residents Online Community](#) and share them with us.

Speaking of WWII, General George S. Patton once said “It’s only by doing things that others have not that one can advance.” We are at war every day with our patients fighting against disease and despair. But we are also currently in a battle to defend our specialty in its ability to provide these services. If we don’t come together and fight to redefine who we are, we will slowly lose the battle, and our patients will suffer in winning the war.