

**Barbara A. Crothers, D.O.**

Views from the Summit

Barbara A. Crothers, D.O., Co-Chair
Future of Cytopathology Summit

It's been a long haul up the mountain, but the view from the peak is spectacular! Over the past several years, the American Society of Cytopathology (ASC) has been observing and discussing future changes to our profession. The scenery has become clearer as academic organizations and larger laboratories expand cytopathology practices, and numerous workable models for cytotechnologists and cytopathologists have emerged. There is no better time to establish a strategic plan for the direction of cytopathology practice, both for cytotechnologists and cytopathologists, to provide patient services into our future.

On November 12-13, 2009, the Future of Cytopathology Summit convened in Denver, Colorado prior to the ASC 57th Annual Scientific Meeting. Invited Summit participants included key members of sister stakeholder organizations, the ASC Executive Board members, and Past-Presidents of the Society. The remaining participants were selected through an objective ranking process that required interested individuals to submit their curriculum vitae and a short statement explaining their interest and potential contribution to the process. Each candidate was numerically ranked based upon the submitted application. The Multidisciplinary Steering Group members graded all candidates independently and totals were tallied for the final selection. The goal was to select a diverse group representing all areas of the country, all types of cytology practices, and to include key stakeholders in the proceedings. It was important to limit participation to 75 members or less so that meaningful discussion and interaction could occur. The Summit participants were distributed to 11 tables of approximately seven members, each with a facilitator who initiated discussion and recorded results. Every effort was made for group diversity at each table. Nearly half of the participants were cytotechnologists. The Summit was facilitated by Ms. Jean Frankel, a principal partner with Tecker Consultants, who has had extensive prior experience in developing new professionals and providing guidance with strategic planning to national organizations.

Ann Moriarty, M.D., ASC President, provided welcoming remarks to launch the Summit, followed by Lynnette Savaloja, SCT(ASCP), the Co-Chair of the Multidisciplinary Steering Group, providing the historical background that paved the road to the Summit. Barbara Crothers, D.O., Co-Chair of the Multidisciplinary Steering Group, introduced the invited speakers: Jan Nowak, M.D., President of the Association for Molecular Pathology; Jared Schwartz, M.D., Ph.D., immediate Past-President of the College of American Pathologists; Donald Simpson, Ph.D., M.P.H., CT(ASCP)^{CM}, President of the American Society for Cytotechnology, and Mark Stoler, M.D., President of the American Society for Clinical Pathology. Each of the Presidents provided a short but stimulating summary of the current and future state of pathology as seen from the perspective of their organizations. Following these discussion, Ms. Frankel established the ground rules and processes for the working groups and lead the groups into discussion.

The Summit represented the culmination of over eight years of ASC committee work and commitment to ensuring the sustainment of cytotechnologists as valued team members in pathology practice. Earlier this year, an Educators Forum, comprised predominantly of cytotechnology faculty, met to discuss and provide solutions for the declining enrollment and closure of cytotechnology schools. Their conclusions and ideas were presented by William Crabtree, Ph.D., SCT(ASCP) at the Summit. Earlier this year, the ASC Student Recruitment and Resources Committee Workgroup drafted a white paper on the development of career ladders for cytotechnologists

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with multiple permutations that build upon existing educational formats. All of this work forms a firm foundation upon which future ASC activity can occur. Nicholas Dudding, a cytotechnologist practitioner from the United Kingdom(UK), gave an interesting impromptu synopsis of the state of cytology in the UK, along with an explanation of how and why a cytology practitioner evolved in that country. Much of the ground work for the Summit was formulated by the Multidisciplinary Steering Group with input from the Executive Board, resulting in five potential future strategies for roles of cytotechnologists in the future:

1. Do nothing
2. Optimize cytotechnologists' current scope of practice
3. Develop new programs for expanding cytotechnologists' scope of practice
4. Create a Cytology Assistant or Practitioner
5. Other

These strategies were posted on a Google Groups Web site prior to the Meeting, and participants and ASC members were encouraged to contribute opinions, supporting data and ideas regarding each strategy. These were consolidated into a white paper and became the template for the Summit discussions. The question central to the strategic analysis is, "what skills will be necessary to support cytopathology in the future, and what kinds of professionals will be most suited to provide these skills?"

Strategy 1 implies that the profession will adapt naturally to current and future training needs and that the organization need not provide assistance or direction in response to market needs or the creation of a new professional. Most participants agreed that although this was the option that has been taken in the past, we face the significant risk of losing highly educated, skilled and competent cytotechnologists whose talents could serve the pathology community and health care at large.

Strategy 2 capitalizes on existing cytotechnologists' skills with on-the-job training or other courses that allow them to expand into other areas of laboratory medicine, using their basic skill set. Participants described many existing examples of skill expansion, and it was recognized that this strategy has already been adapted in most laboratories.

Strategy 3 involves developing formal career courses that build on existing skills but provide a certification or degree upon completion, or that change the current cytotechnology curriculum in major ways to prepare for future needs. It expands the roles of cytotechnologists specifically to meet emerging laboratory needs and to redirect training away from the emphasis on Pap tests and more on general morphologic skills. A core curriculum of laboratory skills could form the foundation from which laboratory subspecialty areas could be built, including management, cytomorphology, molecular pathology, education, and research.

Strategy 4 would invest the Society's efforts in creating a cytology assistant or practitioner. In this model, the cytotechnologist would become a pathologist extender and move into roles supporting pathologists to provide more efficient anatomic pathology services. This idea holds much promise but participants generally agreed that current market forces do not seem to support the need for this individual, and that it would be premature to train for a position without job opportunities. However, participants wished to keep this strategy as an option for the future.

Strategy 5 leaves open the option of developing different directions from those expressed above. E. Blair Holladay, Ph.D., SCT(ASCP)^{CM} proposed a fifth option at the Summit, suggesting that cytotechnology training diverge into GYN (Pap) and Non-GYN pathways.

By the end of the Summit, the group consensus was in favor of Strategy 3, recognizing

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that Strategy 2 was already occurring and that a cytology practitioner is premature and would likely require extended training with courses in medicine and pathology, without the market demonstrating a clear need for this individual. Most of the participants expressed enthusiasm about the process and the opportunity to explore diverse ideas, as well as to discover what solutions have already been implemented in some centers. Sister organizations promised to work in concert to improve the national image of pathology, pathologists and technologists, as well as to find solutions to future staff shortage and patient access problems. The Multidisciplinary Steering Group will compile all of these results in a final white paper for review by the ASC Executive Board, along with a list of potential future actions. The Executive Board will determine the future strategy, and the newly organized Future of Cytopathology Taskforce, under the joint leadership of George Birdsong, M.D. and Sue Zaleski, M.A., SCT(ASCP), will assume the work of implementing the chosen strategic plan.

From this viewpoint at the top, the future looks bright! The way ahead has cleared, obstacles are obvious, and the path is well-lit. The journey begins with the first step. ■

Invitation to Apply for Geraldine Colby Zeiler Awards for Cytotechnology Students

The Geraldine Colby Zeiler Awards for Students of Cytotechnology were established in memory of the late Geraldine Colby Zeiler, who trained at the Mayo Clinic. The generosity of Dr. William B. Zeiler and family and friends of the late Mrs. Zeiler have made these awards possible. The awards are funded through the College of American Pathologists Foundation and administered by the American Society of Cytopathology (ASC). Up to five awards, each consisting of a certificate and \$1,000 are available for this year's award.

Candidates for the awards must have completed the first six months of training in an accredited program. Awards will be based on academic performance, microscopic and diagnostic skills as demonstrated within the program, leadership ability, initiative, acceptance of responsibility, dedication, and relationships with colleagues.

Applications for the awards and recommendation forms are available on the ASC Web site at www.cytopathology.org, or from the ASC National Office, e-mail: awards@cytopathology.org, telephone: (302) 543-6583. ■