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# Editorial

## Considering Change

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As a newly minted senior citizen and possibly past the top of my game, I do not feel especially decrepit. Nevertheless, I am about to leave academic life for lifelong interests in drawing and painting, and to make well-deserved room for colleagues on the rise. I have also considered that it may be more prudent to exit standing relatively tall than to endure the potential indignity, at some point down the road, of being pushed unceremoniously aside. Preparation for change will require relinquishing familiar venues, including the editorship of *Comparative Medicine*. While “letting go” has its melancholy side, it also provides an opportunity to speak with incremental candor.

My decisions to seek change have always followed hard-nosed introspection about who I am and where I am heading. This internal dialogue has been refreshingly therapeutic for tackling new conditions and priorities. It seems obvious that unvarnished reassessments are at least equally relevant to complex groups such as professional societies, which must adapt and occasionally transform in order to thrive. I have felt, for some time, that AALAS could benefit from profound introspection about where it is heading (I am speaking here about probing beyond periodic revision of strategic plans). I exemplify this view here, hoping that my brief comments will be perceived as constructive rather than cranky and stimulate broader thinking about choices on the road ahead.

To my eye, governance should be given a high priority for reassessment, because it is our conceptual, procedural, but arguably outdated bedrock. AALAS has, for many years, employed a geographic model to select the lion’s share of its leadership; most notably the Board of Trustees (BOT). It is assuredly a democratic process which guarantees the regional branches a seat at the national decision-making table. However, it also creates representational hurdles for constituencies vital to the AALAS mission. BOT membership generally reflects the fact that the number of branch members holding technological or managerial positions has grown more rapidly than that of research scientists and clinicians. Further, the categories of voting membership for national officers are not differentiated between scientists and non-scientists. Because the BOT is comprised of individuals

elected by region, it seems clear that balanced representation on the BOT is impeded by current governance. This trend will foster an undesirably hazy identity for a professional society anchored in *science* by self-declared name and mission. Further, the partnership between AALAS and the broader scientific community can flourish only if our scientific and technical bases are both reflected strongly in the national leadership, regardless of demographics. It also is worthwhile noting, in this vein, that there may be other constituencies within AALAS who are uneasy about current governance. Take, for example, vendors who contribute generously to the national meeting and to advertising in AALAS periodicals, but have, to the best of my knowledge, no formal voice in national decision-making.

The preceding concerns imply that effective governance should encompass functional as well as geographic representation. In other words, it should encourage decision-making and planning that benefits directly and consistently from a balanced mix of ideas and energy from all vital AALAS constituencies. Restructuring the leadership to achieve this goal could be, admittedly, a knotty exercise that would require putting aside ingrained concepts and procedures. While change for change’s sake is not justified, there is much to be gained and little to lose by deep deliberation, which, if conducted innovatively, should reveal sharply what is working, what may need fixing and how to go about it.

It turns out that discussions similar to those I am suggesting may soon take place on a closely related issue: leadership of the AALAS journals. They are being stimulated by the coincident search for new editors for *Comparative Medicine* and *Contemporary Topics*. As I understand it, various definitions and models for the future of the journals are being considered as recruitment advances. This process should serve as a good warm-up for a main event focusing on governance and by-laws.

Substantive change entails risk. However, by virtue of talent, knowledge, numbers, mission, finances and longevity, we can afford to take a good, hard look at ourselves as we turn 55 in order to seek consensus, minimize risk and build enthusiasm before moving ahead.