
Editorial Finale

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This issue of *Comparative Medicine* marks the nominal end of my tour as Editor. Nominal because my successor also will shepherd *Contemporary Topics in Laboratory Animal Science*, our companion AALAS journal, and the search for him/her may extend into 2005. Although I may be asked to remain “on watch” pending completion of the search, this editorial is my last as helmsman.

Last hurrahs are often recollections of putative accomplishment. I will forego this option, leaving the strides and stumblings of my journalistic efforts to public assessment. I thought it more important to drum a bit more about a subject of greater moment, the role of science in AALAS, which I most recently addressed in an editorial entitled “Considering Change” (1). In it, I urged revision of governance to strengthen the voice of science in AALAS planning and decision-making. I suggest here additional initiatives in that vein, since a successful outcome will require a multi-pronged and sustained effort. Any doubts I may have had about the relevance of what I propose were put satisfyingly to rest by Hugh Price’s October remarks as incoming president, in which he listed the scientific welfare of AALAS as a major strategic aim.

While rebalancing the leadership through revised governance could be transforming, it also could be difficult to achieve without assuaging skepticism and anxiety among members satisfied with current conditions. Therefore, perhaps the first steps toward revision should demonstrate the value of, rather than legislate, greater scientific input. Here are five ideas which fit that option:

During recent discussions about editorial consolidation, I proposed that a joint board of senior scientists oversee both journals, advising and assessing the new editor in chief. I am pleased that this recommendation, approved by the Communications Committee, will be forwarded to the Board of Trustees (BOT) for action. Board members would be drawn primarily from the AALAS membership, but include extramural biomedical scientists to add expertise from other fields and scientific societies. I envision individual appointments for at least 3 years to enhance editorial strategic planning and nominations that are sought widely, especially from the AALAS academic community.

Second, the AALAS National Meeting aspires to be a marquis for science. Yet serendipity appears to be a traditional wild card in structuring the program, particularly the seminars and special topics lectures. That is, content seems to emerge largely from the audition of spontaneous proposals. This modus, and planning committee turnover, are conducive to premature repetition of

well-vetted topics, oversight of timely topics, and disinterest among members who currently get bigger bangs elsewhere for their scientific travel bucks. The program should gel, instead, from a healthy mix of spontaneous and targeted proposals. The latter should reflect the vision and priorities of a scientist-heavy planning subcommittee (perhaps with input from the Scientific Advisory Committee [SAC]) and result in more offerings at the cutting edge of research, even at the risk of budgetary increases.

Let me dwell further on the SAC for a third idea. Vision fueled by depth and diversity should be at the heart of reinvigorated science in AALAS. This concept was a driving force behind creation of the SAC and is reflected in its key charge to advise the leadership about the scientific and educational missions of AALAS. The promise of this charge remains lamentably unfulfilled. There are several reasons why—the primary one, in my view, being inadequate encouragement of this key SAC role by the leadership. It also is influenced by the dilution of critical scientific “mass” due to appointment of non-scientists to SAC membership. The SAC mission remains at least as important now and for the future as it was at conception. Re-invigoration of the committee will require recruitment and retention of more senior scientists and a clarified, substantive role in AALAS strategic planning.

Fourth, AALAS presents annually two scientific awards, one at the senior level (Brewer Award) and one at the junior level (Bhatt Award). Additionally, the Griffin Award often has a scientific flavor. Nominees are currently evaluated by the Awards Selection Committee (ASC), which also considers honors in other categories. As a result, committee membership is diverse and typically includes few established scientists. It is essential that the quality of the scientific awards be validated and sustained through peer-reviewed selection. In other words, science awardees should be chosen by scientists. Several options toward this end come to mind: 1) selection of the scientific awardees by the SAC, 2) addition of an ASC subcommittee of established scientists to select the awardees or 3) review by the SAC of tentative selections favored by the ASC.

While the foregoing options should help to increase scientific wattage, they still leave somewhat unresolved how to inject a greater and timely scientific presence directly into the BOT. Therefore, as a final suggestion, I recommend ad hoc (i.e., non-voting) BOT membership for representatives of key AALAS scientific constituencies. The present by-laws should be able to accommodate this change without procedural dyspepsia. My favorite candidates would be the editor in chief of the peer-reviewed journals, the SAC chair, the chair of the journal advisory board, and several scientists-at-large; for instance, the chair of

an academic department of comparative medicine, or a leading basic or clinical scientist (perhaps a recent Brewer winner).

To the new leadership, I extend my sincerest wishes for a highly ambitious and productive year, pausing early in the journey to consider ideas presented here for energizing science in AALAS. To all my AALAS colleagues and friends I offer heartfelt

gratitude for the opportunity to have served. May you find fair tides and may the winds remain at your backs.

Reference

1. **Jacoby, R.O.** 2004. Considering change. *Comp. Med.* **54**:404.

In Fond Memory

Leo A. Whitehair, DVM, PhD

Scientist, esteemed colleague, caring friend, courageous patient, and intrepid advocate for comparative medicine and laboratory animal science.