



Sierra Sacramento Valley Medicine

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President's Message

SSVMS' Report Card



By Charles H. McDonnell, III, MD

Just how well does our medical society operate?

IN MY YEARS ON THE Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society (SSVMS) Board of Directors, I have been impressed with the transparency and fairness with which the organization operates. The dedication of so many physician leaders from our three counties has been even more moving.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of our members have not had time to attend a California Medical Association (CMA) meeting or serve on a SSVMS committee. Therefore, it is difficult to appreciate how the SSVMS compares with the other county medical societies. With this "report card," I hope to address many of the questions that have been posed to me by rank and file members over the last few years.

Dues.

The last dues increase was \$5 in 1985, and dues *dropped* \$65 in 2000. Our dues today are \$425. Dues vary widely throughout the state, mainly as a reflection of the size of county medical societies, varying levels of services and degree of participation in CMA activities. In 2007 (the latest data I could find), the range was \$50 to \$545 with the majority at \$350 or more. The range for societies our size and larger was \$350 to \$450. Grade: A-

What was my justification for the A? Did I say dues have been flat for 24 years?

Financial Stewardship.

SSVMS's investments for 14 years have been managed by Patty Estopinal, CIMA, who is Senior Vice President-Wealth Management and Senior Investment Management Consultant with MorganStanley SmithBarney. The investments are reviewed by the SSVMS Executive Committee and Board of Directors at least quarterly. While Kuldip Sandhu, MD, was SSVMS President, he developed a customized index to track our returns against. The customized index represents what returns we would likely achieve if we managed the funds ourselves using only index mutual funds. Patty Estopinal has managed to beat the customized index 7 out of the last 8 quarters.

The investments are conservative as attested to by last year's performance, when the general fund lost only 13 percent compared to more than a 38 percent loss for the S&P 500. The general fund has a reserve approximately equal 15 months of operating expenses, which is within the typical range for not-for-profit organizations. The society's financial operations are audited annually by Lindsay Kate Lane, CPA.

Many members might not know that the SSVMS owns its building at 5380 Elvas Avenue in Sacramento. It is a two-story, 13,500-square foot ADA compliant building with an elevator. It houses our Medical History Museum, board room and executive offices. There are conference facilities upstairs that can be reserved and utilized by SSVMS members; 3,000 square feet of office space is leased out and managed by our executive staff. Grade: A-

Membership.

In 2008 we had 1,592 active members - more than any time in our history - plus 340 retired and 380 medical student members. The 1,592 members represent about half of practicing physicians in the area. This may seem low, but compares favorably to the rest of the state's medical societies; membership ranges between 15 percent and 75 percent with an average in 2007 of 33%. This level of membership makes us the 5th largest society in California. Grade: A-

Administration.

Between executive director Bill Sandberg and associate director Chris Stincelli, there are 62 years of experience and institutional memory. We have a total staff of seven. This ranks toward the top for county medical society administrative capacity. In addition to supporting our own committees and activities, staff support the 11th delegation to the CMA. Bill serves on several community committees and task forces as well as being an advisor to NORCAL Mutual Insurance Company.

I have personally found the extraordinary SSVMS executive staff to be a powerful resource that I believe is underutilized by members. Over the past several years, when I have asked for advice, information or other resources with the expectation of hearing back in a week, I typically get a phone call or email in an hour or two. The next time a question arises in your practice, I challenge you to call SSVMS to experience this level of service for yourself. Grade: A

Environmental Responsibility

(shade of green).

Any evaluation of an organization these days includes an assessment of green practices. While Richard Jones, MD, was president, there was interest in photovoltaic panels for the roof of the SSVMS building, but for many reasons it didn't make sense at the time. Since then, the society has begun replacing the failing single pane windows in the SSVMS building with new, much more energy conserving double pane windows. A couple of HVAC units have also been replaced with much more efficient units.

This year the SSVMS Board of Directors and staff have been implementing a green initiative each month, such as the elimination of bottled water, initiation of recycling and the installation of timed thermostats. The bottom line is that we are off to a good start, but we have a ways to go. Grade: B

Dedication of Members.

The SSVMS currently has 10 active committees that meet on a regular basis (go to www.ssvms.org/about/committees.asp for a list of committees). It is a tradition for the president of the society attempt to attend at least one meeting of each committee during the year. As I have been attending the various committees, I have been amazed at the high level of participation at the meetings. Furthermore, our monthly executive and board of directors meetings are always extremely well attended. For example, last year there was 86 percent attendance rate for the SSVMS board of directors meetings. Grade: A-

SSVMS' involvement and participation with the CMA is excellent. The SSVMS is entitled to 17 Delegates and 17 Alternate-Delegates to the CMA House of Delegates. Our delegate seats never go

unfilled, and there are always ample alternate-delegates waiting in the wings. Admittedly we are at an unfair advantage compared with other county societies, with CMA's annual meeting occurring right here in Sacramento every other year.

SSVMS members also take an active and influential role in CMA leadership. Currently Drs. Richard Pan, Paul Phinney and Lee Snook serve on the Board of Trustees. We have also had several members serve as CMA presidents. The most recent are Drs. John Whitelaw in 2002 and Gene Ograd in 1995. In addition to our experienced executive staff being well known and connected with CMA staff, we also enjoy superior access to CMA with its headquarters in downtown Sacramento at 12th and J Street.

Grade: A-

Community Service.

Community service is not necessarily a core function for county medical societies, but it is for SSVMS. Our Community Service, Education and Research Fund (CSERF) is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization established in 1995 by the Medical Society to involve physicians and the larger healthcare community in community services, education, and research. CSERF's primary programs are the SPIRIT Project, the Adopt-A-School Program, the William E. Dochterman Medical Student Scholarship Fund and the Sierra Sacramento Valley Museum of Medical History. All of these programs are solely supported through contributions and grants from the community.

The SPIRIT (Sacramento Physicians' Initiative to Reach out, Innovate and Teach) Project recruits physicians to volunteer in county clinics in an effort to enhance primary care medical services available to Sacramento's uninsured. The project also offers a specialty service network comprised of office referrals to participating SPIRIT physicians, "specialty sub" clinics located within existing county clinics and hernia repair surgeries done at no charge at local hospitals. Members have donated \$6.2 million in medical services since inception and treated over 27,000 patients throughout the greater Sacramento area.

Last year the SSVMS purchased a Non-Mydriatic digital fundus camera and donated it to Sacramento County to use for screening the uninsured for diabetic retinopathy. The current county financial crisis with county clinic cutbacks is presenting new challenges for our SPIRIT program. We have also initiated a relationship with The Effort Medical Clinic/Community Health Center (a non-county funded community clinic) which just reopened the Oak Park clinic (recently closed by Sacramento County).

Furthermore, our Child and Adolescent Health Services, Emergency Care and Public and Environmental Health Committees and their dedicated members are actively engaged in the community issues. Finally, having Dr. Glennah Trochet, the Sacramento County Public Health Officer, on our Board of Directors ensures that SSVMS is sensitive to, and well informed on public health issues. Grade: A-

Advocacy.

Many members, including myself, believe that the most important function of the SSVMS and CMA is to provide legal and legislative advocacy for physicians in our region. The CMA enjoys advocacy successes each and every year in California, which directly benefits physicians (e.g. maintaining MICRA, blocking Medi-Cal cuts, RICO lawsuits, etc.) I should also point out that the CMA is one of only two state medical societies that supports a lobbyist at the federal level.

At the county level, advocacy is difficult to objectively measure. There are many personal and written communications each year between SSVMS and city, county, state and federal entities. Importantly, many SSVMS members and staff have developed relationships over the years with various elected officials. One somewhat objective measure is that for many years SSVMS consistently has received recognition for having the most "300 Club" members (those members contributing \$300 or more to CALPAC, the CMA's political action committee). Grade: B

In summary, this may be an illustration of grade inflation. Or maybe I am just too biased for this exercise. But our final grade point average is 3.78 (probably not good enough to get into UC Davis for undergraduate work these days).

Furthermore, I only gave out one solid A (there is always room for improvement). I believe this is compelling evidence that we as members of SSVMS have much to be proud of. The credit belongs to the many esteemed former leaders, dedicated members and exceptional executive staff. Thank you for all of your dedication and contributions.

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