

## MANAGEMENT OF ORGANIZATIONS:

### LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE FOUNDING OF THE CONGRESS OF NEUROLOGICAL SURGEONS (CNS)

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#### BACKGROUND

The circumstances that resulted in the formation of a new scientific society in 1951, The Congress of Neurological Surgeons, are not expected to occur again any time soon, but the management principles learned by the organizers are likely to endure. fo

World War II produced a dramatic change in the world of neurological surgery. Some physicians learned neurosurgery while on active duty in one of the armed services. Others experienced either abbreviated training, or had their program interrupted when called to active duty. After the war these young mature neurosurgeons needed to add academic and scientific polish to their training and experience. Existing neurosurgical training programs welcomed them back from the theaters or war, and the number of training sites proliferated.

Thus in the late 1940s and early 1950s there was an explosion in the numbers of young neurosurgeons surfacing in communities and seeking recognition from organized neurosurgical societies.

Established neurosurgical practices were challenged and many newcomers encountered intense resistance from the old timers. There was concern about *the problem of too many neurosurgeons!*

The existing neurosurgical societies were frightened by the prospect of becoming too large, complicating meeting arrangements, and disturbing the camaraderie. Common reactions to this predicament included raising admission requirements, scheduling scientific meetings at expensive resorts or remote places, and postponing action on new membership applications.

Meanwhile the neurosurgical youngsters were conscious of the fact that their intense training was far from complete as they entered clinical practice or academic life. They began to discuss the unexpected hostility they were encountering. Concerns were expressed about the content of many neurosurgical meetings that was either too esoteric or too randomized to be useful for beginners building a career.

Most of the discussions took place at the *Interurban Neurosurgical Society* organized by neurosurgeons Adrian Verbruggen and Harold Voris meeting at the University Club in Chicago. The society was open to all neurosurgeons living no more than one travel day away from Chicago. It met for one day only (Saturday). There was a mailing list, but no dues, by-laws, officers or publications.

About 150 neurosurgeons attended once a year. Most attendees were from the northeast, mid atlantic, southeast and mid west. One or two discussion topics were introduced in the morning and one or two different topics were considered in the afternoon. Most of the meeting time was devoted to lively audience discussion and the conversations continued over lunch and dinner.

There was ample time for *smoked filled hotel room talk* about the plight of young neurosurgeons and the prospect of organizing a new and different neurosurgical society.

Calls and letters went out to anyone thought to be interested in a new society. Twenty two neurosurgeons responded and met in St. Louis, MO. They became the Founding Members of the CNS. Many others were interested, but were unable to attend. Later in the year the first formal organizing and scientific meeting was convened in Memphis, TN, attended by 121 neurosurgeons.

The process of organizing the CNS continued at an intense pace between and during the annual meetings that followed, and in fact the process has never ceased.

The early organizers learned some important lessons about managing a scientific society that continue to guide the CNS leadership. Many of these principles are being applied to improve the performance of other scientific societies by CNS members.

The management principles that follow are listed in random order.

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(\*) Doctor Gay is a Founding Member and Past President of the CNS. His pursuit of multiple professional careers (clinical neurosurgeon and neurologist, assistant medical school dean, director of two Statewide health related programs, and administrator at an academic health science center) is in part the result of his experience in helping to organize the CNS. He is presently serving as a volunteer Chairman, Strategy Committee, Board of Trustees, Wayne Memorial Health System, Honesdale, PA 18431. His current address follows.

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