



# President

MARCH/APRIL 2007 • AMERICAN COLLEGE OF LEGAL MEDICINE

Dear ACLM Colleagues,

Most of the remarks in this, my first Presidential message, are from my acceptance speech in Orlando on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. As many of you were aware (and I say this because of the number of get-well messages I received), as the conference ended, I was admitted to an Orlando Hospital for emergency surgery. I am now at home, back in my office, and doing fine. The position of President has been a health suspect for the last two years, but I do not relate my problem to that of ACLM.

Following the presidency of Richard Wilbur will have its challenges—one, to remain healthy and the other, to lead as you deserve to be led. Richard's ACLM presidency was carried out during a year of peaks and valleys but was always met with integrity and honesty; character, diplomacy, and intelligence; and the possession of a high degree of morality, ethics, and sensitivity for others—as well as for the pertinent issues that faced the College. It was an honor to serve the College under his leadership.

The 47<sup>th</sup> year of ACLM is history and we now enter into the 48<sup>th</sup> year, and as we do, I proudly and humbly accept the presidency of the American College of Legal Medicine, realizing that I am the first dentist ever to accelerate into governance of this elite organization and the first to ascend to the presidency in the 47-year history of ACLM. This is history in the making.

Let me first briefly tell you how I got to this position. My first encounter was as managing editor of the ACLM *Communiqué* with Lou Dyll, but we were shut down after a year because we scooped the medical field or the FDA, as I remember, with a lead article on breast implants. I guess the publication committee couldn't understand why a neurologist and an endodontist were writing about silicone breast implants. During my second encounter, with a founder, I was informed that, as a dentist, I should never expect to have equality with medicine in ACLM; therefore, I was told, just enjoy the back of the room. We could pay our dues but could not participate in governance.

Known as “only a dentist,” I began the quest for equality. Law was never an issue; the issue in ACLM was acceptance of different health providers and the potential of disturbing the MD/JD concept and balance, which was subscribed to by those who have been referred to as the old guard.

Marv Firestone invited me to represent ACLM with Jay Gold and him in Puerto Rico on a risk management program, which turned out to be the Puerto Rican Dental Society. Dan Cullen presented me with my first Presidential Award for Service to ACLM, and then I began to gain the attention of liberal leadership including, but not limited to, Art Gibofsky, Marty Flamm, Art Cohen, Fillmore Buckner, Stuart Reuter, and others. I began serving the first of two terms on the Board of Governors, and additional mentors, supporters, and friends like Phil Ciferelli, Ted Leblang, Dan Shirey (who became a real great pal at every meeting), Phil Shelton, Michael Raskin, Dr. Bob Buckman, and Miles Zaremski lent encouragement. Others then offered encouragement to “the Dentist” and Sandy Sanbar invited me to write the first dental chapter in our textbook, *Legal Medicine*. When Cyril Wecht, one of our icons who held this office from 1970–1972, offered his personal encouragement to me, I knew progress was going to be made.

The tide began to turn and light was visible at the end of the tunnel. The famous phrase in dentistry, “open wide—and then a little wider” was transferred to my quest for equality in ACLM, and I asked you to open your arms wide. They did open. Via a bylaw change, fellowship became a reality

for more health providers than just MDs. David Benjamin, Judy Gic, and others were also waiting for that door to open, and it did. The complexion of the organization began to change and continues to change, without losing the original concept of the MD/JD philosophy and the identity of ACLM. Governance opened to all Fellows of the College, even to single-degree JDs and now, to dentists, without disturbing the MD/JD balance. New bylaws for the acceptance of Dentists were added and Section 1.10 was added to allow a pathway to Fellowship for non-MD/JDs by way of service to the College.

ACLM began to receive outside recognition in airports and on golf courses and in other venues where the newly introduced logo items were worn or carried. People wanted to know where this College was located. We became visible because members started to wear shirts and hats and carry briefcase bags bearing the ACLM logo.

We have just concluded the 47<sup>th</sup> annual conference in Orlando, coordinated by Program Chairman Gary Birnbaum under the watchful eye of Past President Richard Wilbur. David Benjamin and Karin Zucker coordinated the largest poster session held to date. Our attendance was up, we had the largest attendance at a banquet, which was highlighted with the presence of the families of Dr. Wilbur and mine (including nine grandchildren) and by the magical Raymond King, an MD/JD Fellow of the College. Not only did Raymond get College members to participate on stage, he also got some of the grandchildren to participate. The Wecht Lecture had been moved to a lunch debate and drew a full capacity room, and the Sandbar Lecture was equally well accepted. It was quite a meeting, full of education, camaraderie, and collegiality, and I can only hope that those who were not there make plans to attend the 48<sup>th</sup> session in Houston.

History is history and now is the time to reveal my current visions as your President and how and why I will dedicate this year to strengthening and advancing ACLM to an even higher level.

This past year Richard Wilbur and I worked together closely to dissect policies, develop policies and guidelines, simplify governance, and make participation in ACLM activities more user-friendly, accessible, and meaningful. Dick and I were probably the closest working president and president-elect ever, and we had a mission to accomplish together that will continue with this administration. Although our plan recently was temporarily derailed, I plan to return to the tracks and continue policy reviews and improvement of philosophies with President-elect Michael Raskin and the rest of the Executive Committee and Board of Governors.

Nearly every request requires an action, and for every action there is an equal and opposite criticism. We stand ready for any and all actions and criticisms and understand that almost every action will be identified within some Wilbur policy guideline. We will not embark on any slippery slope; there will be a new policy ad hoc review committee to strategize our future actions and, to continue the simplification process and to remain financially sound, I will insist on having a financial impact statement for every new request.

In the educational arena, we will challenge the future meeting chairpeople to maintain the “standard of excellence in education”—our mission and the theme of next year's meeting. We will keep our friendly doors of opportunity open to all of our international colleagues.

We will further the strategic future planning for meetings and venues that we established last year under Philip Shelton's leadership and now under the capable chairmanship of Treasurer Mel Shiffman. We have to know

where we are going and why, at minimum of five years into the future, before we pack our bags to travel. At every future annual meeting, you should have a preview of the next midyear and annual sessions. We cannot operate from the seat of our pants from year to year unless, in time, we want to falter and digress and realize limited growth and loss of membership. We have to understand our mission and know our future.

I will challenge the membership committee to increase our active membership by an appropriate percentage. Are we missing any group of interest and/or are we trying to share expertise with any similar group? Why is our nurse/JD population so few in number? Why did the podiatrists walk away rather than pursue the activity of membership? Chris White did a fantastic intensive study identifying dual-degree individuals. You can now help us by adding to his findings. I ask each of our members of our various membership categories to work hard within their discipline to identify and recruit new members. With the help of President-elect Raskin, we will reconsider revisiting the member-get-a-member program. I want a minimum of 100 new members between now and the time we reconvene in Houston—and that number is low.

We have three major publications throughout the year under the publication chairmanship of Marshall Kapp, who is Editor of the *Journal of Legal Medicine, Legal Medical Perspectives* (edited by Chris White), and *Legal Medicine Q & A* (edited by Judy Gic). Two textbooks, *Legal Medicine and Medical Malpractice Survival Handbook*, were coordinated by Sandy Sandbar and coauthored by many of our members. We are the premier legal organization with a concentrated interest in the health professions; why are we not more visible? How do we become more visible? Your board will be challenged to find a way!

We will improve our visibility for the Bioethics and Student Writing Competition awards under the chair of Kent Harshbarger with 27 volunteer paper reviewers and a subcommittee to develop improved guidelines. We will continue to look for ways to increase member benefits by associating or affiliating with industry partners. This year we have approved an affiliation with Treolar and Heisel, a third-party insurance administrator who will offer our members a wide variety of insurance plans. We also approved the Zarin Publication Group, who is responsible for publishing *Jury Verdicts*, in all specialties of all disciplines. Both will yield non-dues revenue for the College.

The American Board of Legal Medicine and the ACLM Foundation are under the capable leadership of Sandy Sandbar and Bob Buckman, respectively. You will hear more from them during the year as they are now legitimized and well organized.

In October we will return to the midyear meeting format. The theme for the 2007 midyear meeting is “Medical Imaging and the Law,” under the chairmanship of President-elect Raskin. We will magically board a phantom spaceship and blast off to Houston (a new venue for ACLM) for the 2008 annual session, whose theme is “*Standards of Excellence in Legal Medicine*,” overseen by the newly developed program committee under the chairmanship of Darren Mareiniss. That meeting will have a concurrent session for “*Legal Aspects of Dentistry*,” the first time a dental law conference will be held in this country since the early 1990s. If it is successful, it might become an annual event or a standalone conference. Of course our usual annual medical-legal format will be not be compromised. If you want to participate in the Houston meeting, send in your abstracts or let us know of your desire to participate.

Why shouldn't a dental conference or session exist or become a part of our annual meeting? Why should we not have a session devoted to other health providers? The law is the same for all of us; only minor variations exist. Why don't we have a fixed risk-management course and faculty that can travel to different parts of the country and abide by our mission statement, offering our expertise (which was once a dream of Marv Firestone that started and stopped in Puerto Rico)? We will begin to explore that concept.

As acting president for the first few months of this past administration and then returning to the president-elect position, I have initiated, participated

in, or just monitored more than 2,700 e-mails pertaining specifically to ACLM matters. My intention is to keep active communications with the officers, board of governors, staff, and to the entire membership by using electronic transmission, the President's Notes, and our legalmednet system.

I look forward to the future with excitement and enthusiasm. I am excited to begin to working with the new Board of Governors, and I welcome Dale Cowan to the Executive Committee and Victoria Green and Francois Blaudeau to the Board of Governors. We will miss the personality and professionalism of Bob Buckman and Past-President Phil Shelton as they rotate off the Board. However, with the wisdom displayed at the Fellows meeting, the president of the Foundation will now be a permanent member of the BOG, so welcome back, Dr. Bob!

Fortunately—and I mean that sincerely—we have a wonderful staff to work with and who keep us in line. Sue O'Sullivan and Wendy Weiser keep in close touch with me weekly, and Donna Kraar does a great job negotiating venues, such as the property in Orlando and the one next year in Houston; Janet Ward makes sure the money is budgeted properly; Jean Klein makes sure our publication dates are met; and the rest of the support staff Wendy has craftily assembled works hard on our behalf.

I believe that by working together with the staff and the BOG, and listening to the general membership over this next year with continued harmony, collegiality, and respect for each other—and for all health providers interested in the legal system and legal providers interested in the health professions—we can take this organization to that next level. From a page out of history, I paraphrase the famous quote of John F. Kennedy, often used by numerous organizations, “Ask not what ACLM can do for you, ask what you can do for ACLM.” So, what can you do for ACLM? We know what we can do for you; if that is not enough, I challenge you to participate and ask us to do more.

I am accessible electronically at [aclmpresident@aol.com](mailto:aclmpresident@aol.com), and I invite each and every one of you to request some form of participation including, but not limited to, paying your dues, making a contribution to the Foundation, taking the ABLM exam, buying logo items, and registering for the October 2007 midyear and the February/March 2008 annual meetings. I encourage each and every one of you to get involved.

We can and will solicit your participation; however, you should not be shy to step forward, letting us know of your interest. If you are interested, open your mouth and we will open our arms. Our committee structure will be altered slightly. If the committee or position you request is filled, we will put your name on the “desired; want to be involved” list and give it to President-elect Raskin. This year, more than 95 percent of those who requested a position on a committee were appointed. The best future leaders of ACLM are those of you who either ask or demonstrate that you want to be involved, and if you want it, it will happen.

We are a strong, eclectic, and exciting organization thriving on our successes, which are defined by making good decisions based on experience gained by making a few bad decisions in the past, not to be repeated. Our 47 years of success will continue, and this administration will stay the course on the high road and will not be distracted by past events. Fueled by our memories of the past, we will be driven into the future by our visions for tomorrow.

Make your plans now for October in Chicago and then to blast off on the spaceship ACLM into Houston next February/March. We will have a productive and fun year now and into the future; we should not take every issue in life so seriously as to cause stress because in the end, no one gets out of here alive anyway. We have to prioritize, and we will.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve you this coming year. God bless you all, our country and professions, and the American College of Legal Medicine.

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President, ACLM