

The Origins of the Association of Program Directors in Radiology¹

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History is not what you thought. It is what you can remember.

W.C. Sellar

As early as the 1970s there were attempts by the leadership of the AUR to recruit residency program directors, including private (community hospital) directors. The efforts did not go much beyond letters of invitation however, and at the time, complex membership requirements made it difficult for private directors to qualify.

The first substantive effort began in the fall of 1984 when the late Dr. Charles Putman, then the President of the AUR, established the ad hoc committee on residency directors chaired by Dr. Gordon Gamsu, with Dr. Putman and five others as members. The committee was charged with creating a forum and a newsletter for addressing issues important to program directors, and the AUR executive committee was asked to consider changes in the bylaws that would remove impediments faced by private directors. At least two issues of a newsletter were sent out, and participation by readers was spirited. In one of the issues, the exchange of opinions constituted almost 18 unabridged, single-spaced pages.

A “residency director’s symposium” was begun. Unfortunately the format did not lend itself to participation by attendees who may have had homegrown problems they wanted to air, and in the meeting halls, program directors were not identifiable, a factor that made it difficult

to initiate informal discussions with other directors. Private directors, if they attended at all, could be “strangers in a strange land”. Interest waned. There was no appreciable surge in program director membership or attendance.

In 1989 Bill Thompson, an ardent advocate of increasing the participation of private directors became president of the AUR. He appointed Jerry Arndt, a private director-member, to the chairmanship of the ad hoc committee, and supported Dr Arndt’s efforts during the subsequent administrations of Dr. Joe Sackett and Dr. Al Moss, both of whom were strong advocates of increasing program director interest in the AUR.

The residency director’s committee issued special invitations, held a special reception (to enable program directors to meet and converse with Executive Committee members), added nametag identifiers for program directors, and instituted a buddy system, whereby a veteran member hosted a new member; but in the end, the result was nothing more than another blip on the interest chart. It was becoming clear that to attract program directors in significant numbers, a different approach would be required.

At the interim meeting, chaired by Dr. Moss in November of 1991, discouraged by the limited success of the latest efforts, Dr. Arndt asked if the Executive Committee “really wanted to continue to pursue program directors from all sectors”. When the committee reiterated a firm desire to do so, the development of an independent organization of program directors that met with the AUR, but had its own bylaws, its own officers, its own committees, and its own dues structure, was suggested. This idea seemed to catch the imagination of the Executive Committee members and a motion to proceed was passed without a single dissenting vote.

In the ensuing weeks the essential ingredients of a new organization were assembled. A name, bylaws, a logo, stationery, a membership database, and list of candidates

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for officers and committees were developed. Here again, Bill Thompson played a key role, as did another past AUR president, Tom Harle. The knowledge of these men, together with that of Drs Sackett, Moss, Charles Rohrmann and Lee Talner added greatly to the pool of outstanding, qualified people, a factor of critical importance in the embryonic years of any organization.

Preliminary discussions with the ACR regarding an administrative contract were begun. The College already provided administrative services for the AUR as well as for other organizations. Tom Greeson, Chief Counsel for the ACR provided, or arranged for, essentially all of our legal guidance, and did so at no charge to us. We could soon be ready to begin operation as a 501 C-3 corporation registered in the state of Illinois.

Then, in late January, during a routine phone conversation with Dr. Arndt, Dr. Moss raised a question about the enthusiasm with which this proposal would be received by the rank and file program director. Shortly thereafter, with much folding and stamping, a one-page questionnaire was mailed to all 210 M.D. program directors in the US.

Knowledgeable individuals indicated that a 15-25% return from a single mailing was to be expected, however to everyone's amazement responses began pouring in, and ultimately 78% were returned. Almost 85% of respondents were "for" or "strongly for" the proposal, 8% were neutral, and 8% were "opposed" or "strongly opposed". In oil field parlance this 10:1 preponderance indicated that we had "drilled into a high-pressure dome". Interestingly, the group most strongly in favor was from the University sector. SCARD members were slightly less enthusiastic. To our surprise, the least enthusiastic, but still heavily in favor, were directors from the private sector.

Why did the "separate and independent" concept seem attractive where the AUR committee-concept had not? Prestige? A more conspicuous identity for program directors, long relegated to relative obscurity? The lure of a new venture, an experiment in self-determination? Enhanced potential for dialog with the ABR and the RRC, the bodies governing residency programs?

In the Spring of 1992, the membership of AUR, under President Kay Vydareny, officially approved the formation of the APDR, and the first meeting was held. Both Dr. Vydareny and Dr. Paul Capp, Executive Director of the ABR, were initially dubious about the separate and independent concept, but later became strong supporters, without whose help the organization would not have existed or thrived.

Participatory democracy played a key role in the operational success that followed. Round table discussions at the meetings exemplified this system. They created enthusiasm, stimulated innovative solutions, and provided each participant with the sense that he or she had a chance to have his say, and that the words were heard.

As our 10th year draws to a close, the academic societies enjoy a new vigor, generated by common purpose, common goals and mutual respect. Cooperative working relationships have been developed with other radiological societies and with the governing bodies that bear on our training programs. Viewed from the perspective of 2004, it is apparent that the outlook for the academic societies has never been more favorable. Opportunities unimagined in the decade we celebrate, will have been realized before the next has passed.