

## **PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL STATE OF THE ACADEMY REPORT**

**Jerry J. Sweet**

*Evanston Northwestern Healthcare and Northwestern University, Feinberg  
School of Medicine, IL, USA*

As I consider items to be included in this President's Annual State of the Academy Report, it seems obvious to me that the year 2006 was a good year, in a string of good years, for the American Academy of Clinical Neuropsychology (AACN). I am very pleased to be able to share this view, along with information that is certain to lead to agreement among AACN members.

Let me begin by noting that the AACN Board of Directors continues to observe strong interest among our members in serving the organization, as demonstrated by the number and quality of individuals who have volunteered for committee work, specific projects, assisting with the annual meeting, and stepping forward for nomination to the Board of Directors. In that last category of service, Paul Moberg, Mark Mahone, and Kevin Krull began their 5-year terms on the Board of Directors in 2006. With individuals entering, there are also individuals exiting. Daniel Tranel rotated off the Board after years of service, the last of which were served as Treasurer.

The criteria by which success of a professional membership organization is determined can be grouped into several key categories. In my view, these categories can be placed in order of importance as follows: (1) membership growth, (2) financial stability, and (3) service to the proverbial and literal "community" of our members. To be sure, one could add to or qualify these categories, but without these few, other standards likely fall short of defining success for a professional membership organization.

### **MEMBERSHIP GROWTH**

Every May and October the American Board of Clinical Neuropsychology (ABCN), our examining board, holds the oral examinations for candidates who have reached the final stage of the board certification process. Shortly thereafter, the

---

Address correspondence to: Jerry J. Sweet, Ph.D., ENH Medical Group–Psych, 909 Davis Street, Suite 160, Evanston, IL 60201, USA. E-mail: j-sweet@northwestern.edu

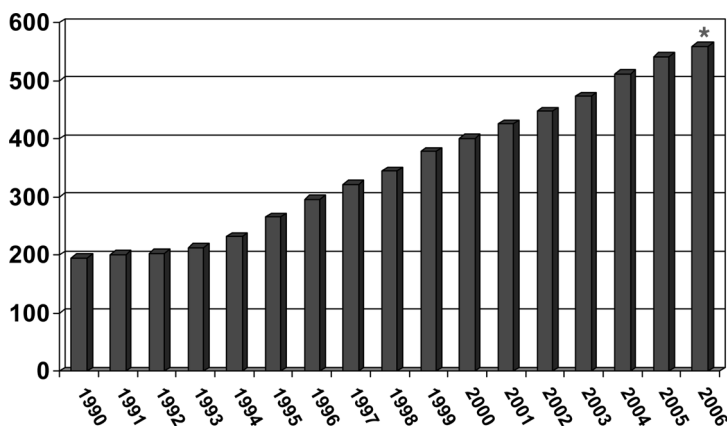
Accepted for publication: September 30, 2006. First published online December 20, 2006.

---

President of ABCN, currently Glenn E. Smith, announces the names of candidates who passed their oral examinations. I trust that readers have noticed that the list of candidates in each announcement is lengthy. Based on data from 1990 through 2005, the average rate of successfully completing the ABCN examination process is 34 annually. Perhaps more important, the number of applications currently submitted and number of exams being scheduled have increased and serve as a signal that interest in board certification in clinical neuropsychology continues to be high and is growing. In fact, though the specialty of clinical psychology draws from a much larger pool of potential board certification candidates, the clinical psychology examining board certifies only a few more individuals per year than ABCN, which ranks second among the thirteen examining boards operating under the auspices of the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP). As is evident in Figure 1, the total number of clinical neuropsychologists who have been board certified through ABCN will soon surpass 600; it was not long ago during Dr. Mapou's term as President that we passed 500.

As your Academy President, I am included in the phone conferences and meetings of the Council of Presidents of Psychology Specialty Academies (CPPSA). In these interactions it seems that the other academies view the success of ABCN and AACN as resulting from our having made board certification part of our "culture" in clinical neuropsychology. In this regard, we are viewed as highly successful by the other ABPP academies.

A major goal of CPPSA is to share information between academies regarding recruitment and operations. Even more noteworthy though is the fact that CPPSA has recently attained the status of having a voting representative at the meetings of the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC), which is the umbrella membership association of physicians who are board certified with the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). As most readers likely know, ABMS is the organization after which ABPP was fashioned.



**Figure 1** Cumulative numbers of individuals board certified by the American Board of Clinical Neuropsychology (ABCN) since 1990. Note: As of May 2006, a total of 571 Diplomates of ABCN.

\*One oral examination remaining in 2006.

To summarize, our membership growth compared to other ABPP specialties can be viewed as very strong. In turn, we are now a member of CPPSA, which is in turn a member of ABMS, the most visible and widely recognized board certification organization in the world.

## **FINANCIAL STABILITY**

In the business world, a well-known label used to describe individuals or groups who fear financial losses is that of being “risk averse.” My perception of neuropsychologists is that we tend to be conservative when it comes to new ventures. If true, it would certainly explain how palpable, and even visible, the anxiety was at recent AACN Board meetings as decisions were contemplated that might have a financial downside. Having an official journal costs the organization nothing, but offering the journal as a member benefit costs money. Having a small annual meeting in a medium-sized Midwestern venue was not free of costs, but the costs were relatively low and fairly predictable. Moving to a larger venue increases costs. In the last year, AACN members were offered our official journal as a membership benefit and gave positive feedback regarding the low cost negotiated with our publisher. Nearly simultaneously, the AACN Board decided to have a larger annual meeting that would rotate to cities around the United States. In both of these endeavors, financial risk was identified and the sizeable associated efforts to overcome the risk have paid off. As a result, the financial status of AACN is stable. In fact, the larger-scale annual meeting in Philadelphia, PA in June made a profit, which exceeded budget expectations.

I am left to conclude that while neuropsychologists, at least those elected to our Board, are in some sense “risk averse,” they can and have nevertheless determinedly and judiciously set new goals for the Academy and have successfully attained those goals. In my view, the net effect is very positive.

## **SERVICE TO THE “COMMUNITY”**

The term community in this instance has two meanings. We have first the broader community, or society, in which we work and live. The setting of standards for professionals, as exemplified by the board certification process, is fundamentally to be for the good of the public. Identification of individuals as “board certified” in a clinical profession assists the public and institutions, such as hospitals, in identifying individuals whose training and experience has been subjected to peer review. Though no guarantee of quality, the intent is to provide a type of quality control that the public cannot determine without the assistance of a profession. As our numbers grow, we further the interests of society in this regard.

A second community is comprised of those who practice in the specialty. It is essential that a professional membership organization, such as AACN, serve the educational and other needs of those who practice clinical neuropsychology. In recent years, and now on an ongoing basis, the AACN Board has taken this responsibility more seriously and raised our expectations considerably. What follows is a brief exposition of current activities being undertaken for the benefit of our community of peers.

### **Annual conference**

Our annual conference in Philadelphia in June 2006 was an enormous success. The attendance was much higher than in previous years, with well over 400 attendees. Greg Lamberty, with assistance from Ida Sue Baron and Robert Heilbronner, organized a very high-caliber program. Richard Kaplan once again organized the awarding of continuing education (CE) credits, this year streamlined to being awarded on site. Rus Bauer was given the Distinguished Neuropsychologist of the Year Award at the all-conference annual luncheon. The scientific poster session, organized by Mike McCrea, was high quality and much larger than in prior years. The attendee ratings of the 22 continuing education workshops were consistently very high. As mentioned earlier, the meeting finances were profitable and better than budgeted. A major reason for this year's success was the work of conference coordinator Sandra Koffler, whose tireless efforts and strong encouragement led to the hiring of a first-rate meeting vendor and a successful transition from paper to online registration. The momentum from the Philadelphia meeting has been continued via a more organized approach with a greater number of members involved in planning for the June 7–9 2007 meeting in Denver. With the assistance of Denver neuropsychologists, who form the Local Site Committee, with Tish Thompson (Chair), Michael Kirkwood, Greta Wilkening, and Josette Harris, and an extensive meeting plan structure in place, this meeting is already shaping up very nicely. Also, the AACN Board has begun to look forward to 2008, at which time our annual conference and workshops will take place in Boston. Aaron Nelson has agreed to be the Local Site Committee Chair for the Boston meeting.

### **Specific Projects**

**Online continuing education.** For more than a year, the AACN Board has been discussing and planning to launch online CE credit tied to designated articles in our official journal, *The Clinical Neuropsychologist* (TCN). Richard Kaplan has been spearheading this project. Beginning with issue 2 of the 2007 volume of TCN, approximately four articles per issue will be designated as available for CE credit. This designation will appear in the table of contents and on the first page of each article selected. Instructions will be provided in the back of the issue regarding how to access the AACN website and in turn the questions that must be answered in order to obtain the CE credit. As is the case with the workshops at our annual conference, these credits will be provided under the auspices of the American Psychological Association CE program. These credits will be available to all clinical neuropsychologists, whether AACN members or not, with the cost for non-members set higher than that for members. Affiliate members will be able to obtain CE credits at the same rate as members.

**AACN/Oxford University Press book series.** Oxford University Press originated a creative idea for development of a book series. In response to the recommendations of Oxford authors and other professionals in the neuropsychology community, AACN was approached to be the sole business partner within neuropsychology. The AACN Board at its Philadelphia meeting voted to sign a contract for the book series, and an advisory panel of AACN members (Ida Sue Baron,

Sandra Koffler, Greg Lamberty, Richard Kaplan, and Jerry Sweet) was formed and began working with Oxford. In a nutshell, for each annual meeting, some workshop presenters will work in advance with Oxford to create a brief text whose publication will coincide with the presentation of their workshop. Those registered for the workshop will receive the text, which will also be for sale during and after the meeting for those unable to attend the workshop or the meeting. Each volume will include a CE component and access to a Web version of the CE component on the AACN site (but separate from the online CE program linked to TCN), as well as the workshop's archived slide presentation and on occasion enhancements such as additional photographs or illustrations. This project promises to be quite exciting and will be rolled out, as they say in the business world, at this year's annual conference and workshops in Denver.

**Salary and professional practice survey.** The accepted manuscript for the "2005 Salary Survey" was posted on the AACN website for a number of months. Publication of the survey occurred as the lead article in issue 3 of the 2006 volume. The PDF of the publication is available as a downloadable file to members and non-members at <http://www.theaacn.org/> under "papers/policies/research."

**Practice guidelines.** Robert Heilbronner, Practice Committee Chair, and members of a Practice Guidelines Subcommittee (Lidia Artiola i Fortuny, Erin Bigler, Kyle Boone, Richard F. Kaplan, Greg Lamberty, Neil H. Pliskin, Michael Schmidt, H. Gerry Taylor, Karen Wills) have been working on neuropsychological assessment practice guidelines for more than 2 years. After much consultation and crafting, including consultation with the committee from a panel of senior members of the field (Ken Adams, Carl Dodrill, Wilfred van Gorp, Ida Sue Baron.) the AACN Board has approved publication in TCN. These guidelines are currently available for comment from members at the AACN website.

**Website use and upgrading.** Many of you may have noticed that the frequency of updates to our website has increased, and the amount of information on the website is also increasing. With the initiation of new projects that can function through our website, the AACN Board decided to identify a true dedicated webmaster, whose skills would improve the utility and functionality of our website. During the summer, recommendations of individuals were considered, which resulted in the selection of Ken Dugas from the University of Connecticut. Ken is an information systems specialist whose years of full-time experience will benefit us greatly. He has already worked closely with Mike McCrea to create the electronic submission and review capability for this year's annual meeting poster abstracts. He has also been working closely to implement the new online CE project. If you have ideas regarding changes that might improve our website, please contact me or any Board member.

**Expansion and other developments with our official journal.** Due to the number of high-quality submissions, the backlog of accepted papers at TCN awaiting publication grew to unacceptable proportions. To accommodate the flow of manuscripts, the editors worked with our publisher Psychology Press to increase the page allocation, from 600 to 720 in 2006 and to 960 pages in 2007. Additionally, in 2007, the number of issues per year will increase from four to six. Despite this growth in the physical size of the journal, subscribers who receive TCN as a member

benefit, which is provided to AACN members and affiliates, will *not* experience a cost increase. Authors whose manuscripts are published in TCN will have noted by now that an online prEview publication takes place at the Psychology Press website for TCN approximately 1 month after acceptance. The online version is complete, with the exception of the final printed page numbers, and is available to any individual or employee of an institution with online access. Less visible to readers, in response to concerns about the production process from the editors, the production of TCN has been moved by the publisher back to staff in England. This location change is intended to increase reliability of production. I want to underscore that our publisher Psychology Press has been very supportive of our journal's mission and growth, and has ensured that TCN can benefit from the rapid growth in options and usage of electronic access by institutions and individuals around the world. Such access has notably increased the availability of our published articles.

A final development that will be of interest to members and affiliates is a new section that begins within this very issue of TCN. A new Grand Rounds section has been created, exclusively devoted to presentations of individual cases, with Joel Morgan as Section Editor. Adult and child cases of interest that will appear within this section include: classical neuropsychological syndromes, unusual presentations of well-known disorders/syndromes, rarely seen disorders, and other cases of distinction.

### **SUMMARY OF THE STATE OF THE ACADEMY: SO, HOW ARE WE DOING?**

Though each AACN member and affiliate will have to answer the above question for herself/himself, my view is that our Academy is doing very well. Having been on the AACN Board of Directors since its inception in 1996, and noting the ongoing increase in activities and investment of energy from numerous individuals within our Academy, I am tempted to rephrase the slogan used years ago in Oldsmobile commercials and say that "this isn't your daddy's AACN." But with so many young members I might be totally misunderstood! Instead, perhaps it is better to underscore the obvious; we are a vigorous and energetic organization that is evolving in directions that I view as very positive for the organization and for the profession. In this regard, the aspirations of the AACN Board have been raised year after year. AACN now has numerous goal-specific activities with which many members have become involved and more are becoming involved each year. Members who have not yet become involved can do so, in activities ranging from the annual meeting to the important work of various committees. If you wish to become more involved, please contact me or any Board member or committee chair. We would be happy to include you. Meanwhile, give our annual conference and workshops serious consideration. Hope to see you in Denver in June!