



The Importance of Formal Training for Transplant Surgeons

JOHN S. NAJARIAN, 1977–78

I served as the fourth president of the American Society of Transplant Surgeons from June 1977 to June 1978. My Presidential Address focused on the importance of education as a foundation for the emerging clinical field of organ transplantation. Before this time, transplant surgeons were trained in a variety of ways—primarily on the job. I felt strongly that a formal training program, as we had developed at the University of Minnesota, would be important for our discipline's growth in quantity and quality.

Dick Simmons and I had established a formal fellowship training program in transplantation at the University of Minnesota in 1969. Initially, our program involved six months of training of what we called a donor doctor; responsibilities included placing all the access lines and shunts as well as doing all the donor operations (both cadaver and living related). During the second six months of our training program, the fellow would be responsible for the renal recipient, and would perform or first assist on all the transplant procedures.

In my Presidential Address, I stressed the importance of this kind of formal training for individuals who had completed their surgical training and had qualified for the American Board of Surgery. Because multiple-organ transplantation was coming on the clinical scene (primarily liver, pancreas, and kidney), I also stressed that comprehensive general surgical training should be the prerequisite for a transplant fellowship. I felt that candidates for the American Society of Transplant Surgeons should have completed a minimum of one year of a formal transplant fellowship, along with their Boards (preferably in general surgery, but urology was also acceptable given the prevalence of renal transplantation at that time).

Two years later, in his 1980 Presidential Address, Dr. James Cerilli reemphasized the importance of training that I had suggested in my address. He placed on my shoulders the responsibility for developing quality programs that would become the standard in this country. Specifically, he appointed me chairman of the newly formed

Education Committee and put me in charge of evaluating and approving training programs at institutions involved in clinical transplantation. Only approved institutions would be listed in the annual American Society of Transplantation Surgeons program book. Completion of training at an approved institution, along with the Boards in general surgery or urology, would be required for membership in the American Society of Transplant Surgeons.

My 1978 Presidential Address also suggested inviting basic scientists in immunology to give a lecture to the society each year—in keeping with my theme of improving education for transplant surgeons. The selection of this honored lecturer would be the prerogative of the president. My choice to be the first honored lecturer was Sir Peter Medawar, the 1960 Nobel laureate and “Father of Transplantation,” whose presentation was entitled “The Wider Implications of Transplantation Surgery.” The following year, Dr. Frederick Merkel as president chose another world-renowned transplant immunologist, Dr. Robert Good, to be the honored lecturer. This tradition has continued to the present. Five years ago, it became apparent that a more extensive means of continuing education was needed. Hence, the postgraduate course in transplantation was begun: on the Saturday after the annual meeting, invited lecturers give overviews of relevant subjects in immunology and clinical transplantation. The papers from that day are published annually in *Clinical Transplantation*.