

FELLOW'S CORNER—REVIEW ARTICLE

A Framework for Measuring the Value of Professional Society Membership as a Fellow-In-Training or Early Career Physician

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Abstract

Fellows-in-training (FITs) and early career physicians with particular interest in cardiovascular imaging have a multitude of professional society ‘homes’ available to them. Determining the value of professional society membership and the ultimate choice of which to join can be difficult. A framework including honest assessment of personal expertise and candidate societies’ track record of educational output, structured leadership development, and forward-thinking strategic planning can be helpful in decision-making related to this critical component of early career development.

Keywords: Early career, Education, Fellows, Leadership, Strategic initiatives

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Many fellows-in-training (FITs) are now choosing to dedicate one or more years to an advanced cardiovascular imaging (ACVI) training program to have true expertise in nuclear cardiology, echocardiography, cardiac MR, and/or cardiac CT (1). For these FITs and early career physicians with particular interest in cardiovascular imaging, there are a multitude of professional society ‘homes’ available. Determining the value of professional society membership and the ultimate choice of which to join can be difficult. Nevertheless, professional society membership is a critical component of early career development. As a recent ACVI training program graduate, I faced this choice a few years ago and chose the American Society of Nuclear Cardiology (ASNC) as one of my professional homes. By sharing the factors that influenced my decision, I hope to provide a framework that FITs and other early career physicians can use to make their own decisions.

Choose one area of expertise

During the course of my ACVI training, I learned and obtained board certification in several cardiovascular imaging modalities. However, I knew, as recent training statements have explicitly stated, that I did not have the training or

experience to function at the current state of the art across the full multimodality cardiovascular imaging spectrum (2). By that definition, I could only be considered an ‘expert’ in nuclear cardiology and perhaps one other modality. After that realization, it became clear that ASNC could be a professional home for me.

Track record of high-quality educational output

When evaluating the value of ASNC membership as a FIT, my first consideration was the track record and quality of its educational products. Consistent production of high-quality ‘outward-facing’ educational events and materials – including annual scientific sessions, clinical guidelines and quality standard documents, board preparation courses, and webinars – reflect strong societal leadership that embraces lifelong learning and quality improvement for both members and the wider medical community. ASNC has hosted a well-attended annual scientific session for over 20 years, its clinical guidelines and quality standard documents are highly cited throughout the cardiovascular community (3-5), it provides a comprehensive board preparation course in both live and digital formats, and it regularly hosts webinars on topics relevant to current and aspiring nuclear cardiology practition-

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ers. Together, these products convinced me that ASNC would serve me well as a hub for my own lifelong learning and quality improvement.

Structured leadership development

The second criteria I used to judge the value of ASNC membership as a FIT was its well-established 3-year Leadership Development Program. Having such a program shows that the professional society understands its senior leadership and other high-quality mentors must be directly available to mentor FITs and early career physicians. Second, it signals that the society explicitly encourages incorporation of these younger members' opinions in strategic planning and initiatives. The length of ASNC's Leadership Development Program allows ample time to learn about the society, including its leadership, its membership, and its initiatives. Finally, the emphasis on a specific leadership 'track' in research/education, advocacy or clinical quality encourages an initial deep, meaningful contribution to the society that is likely to garner recognition and open the door for future leadership opportunities.

Forward-thinking long-term strategic initiatives

The final criteria that I used to judge the value of ASNC membership as a FIT was its long-term strategic initiatives. As a FIT or early career physician, it is important to choose professional societies that have forward-thinking long-term strategic initiatives that will ensure their continued relevance to both us as members and the wider medical community. For me, ASNC's ImageGuide Registry (6) is its most important forward-thinking long-term strategic initiative. The registry provides ASNC with a valuable and sustainable data and revenue stream. More importantly, however, it shows that ASNC intends to be an enduring and meaningful contributor to advocacy efforts aimed at improving the cost-effective use of cardiovascular imaging and healthcare quality (7). This means that younger members can count on ASNC to be a strong advocate on their behalf throughout their careers and, equally as important, that ASNC offers them an established, respected platform to share their opinions with policy decision-makers.

Conclusion

FITs and early career physicians considering the value of professional society membership may find it useful to consider their own personal expertise as well as candidate societies' track record of educational output, leadership development, and strategic planning.

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Conflicts of interest

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