

Proud of the Past, Planning for the Future

by Myron J. Zitt

Introduction

The establishment of the American College of Allergy (ACA) was conceived by Dr. Frederick W. Wittich of Minneapolis in 1942 to achieve the highest possible standards among those engaged in the practice of allergy through education and certification.¹ In Dr. Wittich's own words, the College came into existence "because of the deep-seated conviction of its founders that a liberal organization, based upon and combining the principles of humility and justice, is needed to fill an important gap in the present structure of allergic affairs."²

The newly formed organization's inclusive membership policy was especially attractive to young physicians interested in the specialty who "need the encouragement that comes with early and fitting recognition" attainable through doors "impartially open to all who possess the necessary qualifications to meet its standards and requirements for eligibility," Dr. Wittich said. Today, the association provides its 4,963 members with continuing medical education, publications, and

representation to managed care organizations, medical organizations, consumer and patient groups, and government and regulatory agencies. The College also develops and disseminates educational information to patients, other physicians, health professionals, and health plan administrators. The following milestones highlight the role of College leadership in shaping the allergy-immunology specialty.

Founding and Early Achievements

The College was officially incorporated as a legal entity on November 23, 1942, in Minneapolis, MN. Officers and 45 founding members were elected on December 11, 1942, in Kansas City, MO. The first issue of *Annals of Allergy*, its official journal, was published in 1943.

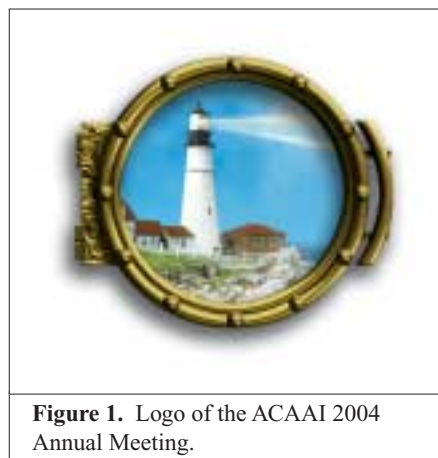


Figure 1. Logo of the ACAAI 2004 Annual Meeting.



Figure 2. ACAAI President-Elect Myron J. Zitt, MD

The following year, the College held its first annual meeting June 10–12, at the Palmer House in Chicago, IL. The program consisted of 28 presentations, many devoted to allergic disease in the military. In 1946, three functions of the College were identified as education, certification, and public relations, the latter including a research foundation. The formation of the American Society of Certified Allergists was announced as a division of the College in the January issue of *Annals of Allergy*.

Two major allergy organizations prevalent in the 1940s were the Western Society for the Study of Asthma, Hayfever and Allergic Diseases ("Western Society"), founded in 1923, and the Society for the Study of Asthma and Allied Disorders ("Eastern Society"), founded in 1924. Their merging led to the formation of the American Academy of Allergy and Immunology in 1943, one year after the founding of the College.

The College's international outreach began in 1951 with the founding of the International Association of Allergology, conceived by Dr. Wittich. Its first meeting, held September 23–29, 1951 in Zurich, Switzerland, attracted 600 participants from 28 different countries. Since there was no support for full-time faculty or funding for research or training programs during this period, the College

¹ August 27, 1949 letter from Dr. Wittich to the Members of the Board of Regents, The American College of Allergists.

² Wittich FW. Introduction. *Ann Allergy* 1943; 1:60–61

Historical information is summarized from the Presidential Address presented by Joseph A. Bellanti, MD, at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the American College of Allergy and Immunology, Chicago, Illinois, November 14, 1992. *Annals of Allergy*. 1993;70:445-461.



Figure 3. The ACAAI's multimedia archives, which include historical documents and interviews with former leaders, are on display at each Annual Meeting.

leadership served as the backbone of the specialty through their contributions as voluntary clinical chiefs at many hospitals and medical schools.

Vision Becomes Reality

The American Association of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (AACIA) was formed in 1964 for the purpose of establishing a separate autonomous certifying Board. The following year, a resolution by the College Board of Regents disavowing the formation of the newly formed certifying Board of the AACIA was published in the *Annals*. The College established a Committee on Certification that continued to work with the AACIA and Section on Allergy of the American Medical Association (AMA), from which the American Board of Allergy and Immunology (ABAI) was shaped. During this time, ACA and AACIA leaders also mobilized the first of the educational courses for preparation of individuals for certification, which became the prototype of the subsequent courses offered by the College.

After a 30-year struggle, the College achieved one of its primary founding goals with the formation of the ABAI in

1972, as a Conjoint Board of the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) and the American Board of Pediatrics (ABP). The AACIA hosted the first post-graduate course to prepare candidates for their certification examination in 1972, and the first ABAI examination was given in March 1974.

In response to the changing socioeconomic climate of the country, the Joint Council of Allergy and Immunology (JCAI) was established in 1974 through the joint support of the College and the Academy.

In 1982, the College offices moved from Boulder, CO, to Chicago, IL, and a professional management team was brought in under the leadership of Jim Slawny. A major strategic planning campaign and massive recruitment drive were launched, resulting in unprecedented growth in membership and financial stability.

The College merged with the AACIA in 1987 and changed the name of the new organization to the American College of Allergy and Immunology (ACAI). A major restructuring of committees was implemented in 1989 with the development of the scientific, communication and educational councils. This, combined

with major streamlining and By-Laws revisions, resulted in greater efficiency of the organization.

A Decade of Dynamic Change

The past decade has seen the College's most dynamic years. In response to major changes in the nation's health care delivery system, the College launched a Healthcare Reform Initiative in 1994 to: (A) educate the public and health profession about the role of the allergist; and (B) to protect the patient's rights.

During this time, the College led the specialty in addressing managed care issues through the creation of a strike force team of ACAAI members. This aggressive campaign educated managed care executives and treatment gatekeepers about referrals of asthma and allergy patients and provided documentation on how allergists improve outcomes and lower costs. It continues today as the Key Contact Network.

Also in 1994, the College changed its name to the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI), renamed its journal *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology* and published a patient education brochure, *When Should I See an Allergist*.

The College launched several public education programs. The ACAAI Nationwide Asthma Screening Program, launched in 1997 and now in its eighth year, has provided screenings for more than 75,500 adults and children. Other initiatives have included the School-Based Asthma Screening Program and awareness programs on immunotherapy, children's allergies and asthma, when to see an allergist, and managing indoor allergies.

Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology introduced the first CME and self-assessment test and moved into the No. 1 position in advertising sales among allergy journals. The College also created *AllergyWatch* in 1999, a bi-monthly synopsis of current medical lit-

erature. The Internet provided additional communications tools, and the College established public and member websites. As one of six founding members of Medem, Inc., in 2000, it provided free practice websites and an online library of peer-reviewed medical literature to members. The *ACAAI eNews* biweekly electronic newsletter was initiated in 2001.

International outreach efforts were energized through a reorganization of the College's International Committee into geographic portfolios, adoption of its international CME ambassador program, and establishment of the International Affiliate Membership to facilitate global information exchange.

Since its founding, the College has been strongly committed to attracting pediatric and internal medicine residents to the specialty, in addition to supporting fellows-in-training, training program directors, and young physicians. Leadership strengthened this commitment in recent years by initiating a Visiting Professor program for medical schools, publishing *Allergy – Clinical Immunology Learning Objectives for Medical Students*, and establishing a program for regional medical students in conjunction with its Annual Meeting.

To increase its support through its various award and grant programs, the College created the Foundation of ACAAI in 2002 and launched a five-year funding campaign to provide additional funding to training programs. The College initiated the Acorn Project in November 2003, allocating US \$1.5 million for training 15 new allergy fellows over the next three years.

Planning for the Future

The goals of the College leadership include:

- a) strengthening ties with lay organizations;
- b) increasing public awareness and education with regard to allergic and immunologic diseases;

- c) broadening our international membership base by promoting and participating in international activities;
- d) expanding our scope of interest to include nonrespiratory immunologic diseases; and
- e) supporting training programs in allergy and immunology to assure the perpetuation of the specialty proven to provide optimal care for patients with asthma and atopic diseases (The Acorn Project).

The ACAAI Annual Meeting in Boston, Nov. 11–17, 2004 exemplifies progress toward achieving these goals:

- a) A novel program to be conducted by the ACAAI in cooperation with the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America will bus high school students and their science teachers to the Convention area to learn about asthma and allergies.
- b) Asthma and Allergy Network, Mothers of Asthmatics (AANMA), Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN), and Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) will host exhibit booths at the Boston meeting. It is anticipated that increasing efforts to partner with these lay organizations will lead to improved recognition and management of allergic diseases.
- c) In keeping with ACAAI goals to promote increasing international participation, the Annual Meeting will, for the first time, feature a program to be conducted by the Hispanic American Allergy Society.
- d) As needs assessment surveys indicate high interest for educational programs on immunotherapy, this subject will be featured in an all-day pre-meeting symposium.
- e) With increasing recognition of the allergist's need to expand horizons and interact with other specialties, a novel dermatology program entitled "Derm Fest" will consist of didactic sessions including luncheon and dinner programs, interactive workshops, as well as a "walk through" the practice parameters on atopic dermatitis at the Boston Museum of Science. This 2-day program will be available not only to meeting registrants, but to derma-

tologists and other interested caregivers.

- f) The Annual ACAAI Foundation Fundraiser to support the Acorn Project as well as children's asthma camps will include a dinner and concert at Symphony Hall featuring Keith Lockhart and the Boston Pops Orchestra. A special ceremony is planned during the fundraiser to recognize the many contributions and support of the Auxiliary of ACAAI, celebrating its 50th Anniversary.

Scientific sessions will be chock full of cutting-edge material presented by national and international thought leaders in a variety of engaging debate and point/counter point formats. The Annual Literature Review Course which originated at the College and has long been a highlight of the meeting will again be conducted, as will an array of interactive workshops and intimate Meet the Professor breakfasts. As in the past, the meeting will also feature courses for allied health professionals, office administrators, asthma educators, and those involved in clinical research.

Building on its past accomplishments, the College is planning an exciting 2004 Annual Meeting and numerous programs that will lead to enhanced future patient care in the field of allergy, asthma, and immunology.

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