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The Key Role of the International Society for the Advancement of Spine Surgery in Advancing Spine Arthroplasty

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Since its inception in 2000, the International Society for the Advancement of Spine Surgery (ISASS; formerly the Spine Arthroplasty Society) has been the major society advocating new treatments for spinal disorders. After its inception, it quickly became known and recognized among spinal surgeons as “the place to go.” While other societies worried about many of the political implications of providing spinal care, ISASS created an environment “for physicians and by physicians” to promote the highest level of science without the political constraints of some larger organizations. Probably the single greatest example of the importance of this forum was related to the development of arthroplasty, first in the lumbar and then in the cervical spine. ISASS became the ideal place for the presentation of novel ideas regarding arthroplasty, both on-label and off-label usage. It is a more relaxed environment that has facilitated frank physician-with-physician discussion, which promoted the growth of spinal arthroplasty as a whole. I believe ISASS played a major role in the fact that arthroplasty is the most studied and most documented procedure of all spine surgery procedures.

During the peak years of research and development for novel spinal arthroplasty devices, the halls were filled during all the society meetings as numerous US Food and Drug Administration study were presented. There was always great enthusiasm at ISASS—more so than at other society meetings—as initially preliminary results, then 2-year- and ultimately 5-year data and beyond, demonstrated increasingly undeniable evidence in support of total disc arthroplasty as a superior treatment alternative to spinal fusion for so many patients.

At ISASS, disc arthroplasty symposia were always a prominent part of the program, where surgeons from around the world could learn about successful patient outcomes after disc replacement at 2, 3, and even 4 levels. We had iron-clad research evidence on hundreds and then thousands of patients, adding to the pressure to get US Food and Drug Administration device approval—and then the ever-elusive payer coverage—to bring forward this important option for patients.

ISASS has continued to allow us to advocate for our patients, both in professional discussions occurring at the meeting as well as in the journal, to help us promote newer treatments that will benefit thousands of patients in the future. I am proud to be part of ISASS essentially from its inception until the current date, and I can emphatically state that it is my favorite meeting to attend of all the spine meetings here and around the world.

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