

Making the Most of Retina Meetings

How a few days can accelerate the first few years of your career.

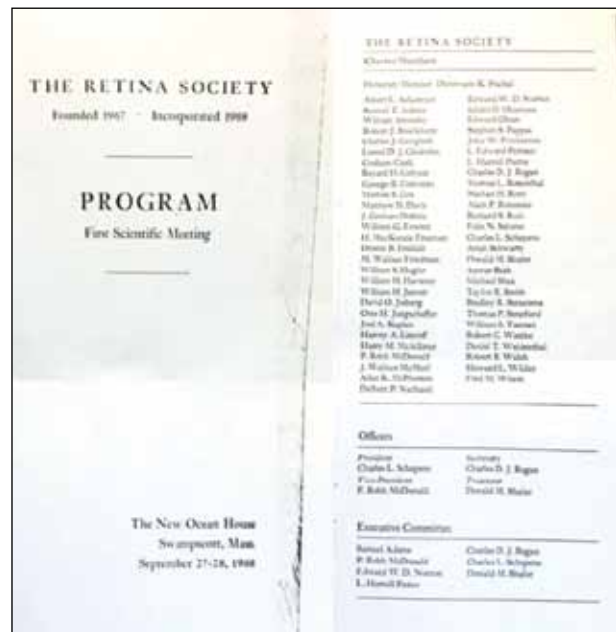
BY JOHN D. PITCHER III, MD

Retina meeting season is upon us, and making the most out of your opportunities as a fellow in training can be a critical but challenging process. Understanding what meetings have to offer and the best ways to take advantage can be an important part of building a successful career.

The spirit of the annual meetings began in the early days of retina, when it was still being established as a subspecialty. Founding members sought to create a forum where colleagues could exchange clinical and scientific information. In the 1950s and 1960s, the alumni meetings of the Retina Associates, under the leadership of Charles L. Schepens, MD, grew into the Retina Society, which held its inaugural scientific meeting in Swampscott, MA, on September 27 and 28, 1968. The attendees included the 56 initial members, including William Annesley, MD; Harvey A. Lincoff, MD; Alice R. McPherson, MD; Edward W.D. Norton, MD; Bradley R. Straatsma, MD; William S. Tasman, MD; and Robert C. Watzke, MD (Figure 1). Nearly 10 years later, the first meeting of the Macula Society was held in Key Biscayne, FL, where J. Donald Gass, MD, opened the first session.

Membership applications to these organizations are subject to acceptance criteria, including a minimum number of years in practice (Table 1). Membership numbers are relatively small, and more typically comprised of those in academic positions. Historically, this has fostered camaraderie at meetings, which can provide fantastic networking opportunities for those interested in a career in a university setting. Fellows who are sponsored by members of the Retina Society or Macula Society can present original research and attend annual meetings of these organizations, which this year are located in Beverly Hills, CA, and Key Largo, FL, respectively.

Carl D. Regillo, MD, Director of the Retina Service at Wills Eye Institute, offers this advice: "The career mileage you gain from a podium presentation far outweighs a poster. I recommend that retina fellows pursue this option, as the positive exposure you gain from a well-



Courtesy of William S. Tasman, MD.

Figure 1. Scientific program of the inaugural meeting of the Retina Society, 1968.

delivered research talk can go a long way toward impressing future employers." At each annual meeting, the Retina Society recognizes outstanding research endeavors by fellows in the form of the Fellowship Research Award and the Margherio Award. In addition to building your CV, most fellowships also provide support for travel expenses if you are presenting as first author because it is a good reflection on the quality of the training program.

The annual meeting of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) offers an additional platform to present projects. Although ARVO is traditionally a basic-science-oriented meeting, clinical research is increasingly being highlighted, and abstract acceptance rates are high. A day at an ARVO convention can be overwhelming, as the meeting draws more than 12 000

TABLE 1. DETAILS OF THE 3 MAJOR SOCIETIES.

	Founded	Membership criteria	Founding Members	Next Annual Meeting	Current President	Number of Members	Website
American Society of Retina Specialists	1982	Current retina fellows or practicing retina specialists	Jerald A. Bovino, Roy A. Levit, and Allen Z. Verne	August 24-28, 2013; Toronto, Canada	John T. Thompson	2400	asrs.org
The Retina Society	1967	Three years active practice after fellowship	Charles L. Schepens, Robert Brockhurst, Charles Regan, and David Roby	September 26-29, 2013; Beverly Hills, CA	Charles C. Barr	595	retinasociety.org
The Macula Society	1977	Two years post fellowship active practice, 2 letters of recommendation from active members, 2 publications as first or corresponding author in last 4 years	Lawrence J. Singerman, J. Donald Gass, and Arnall Patz	February 19-22, 2014; Key Largo, FL	Neil Bressler	423	maculasociety.org

attendees from nearly 80 countries. Fellows should use the online itinerary planner and focus on high-yield sessions. For instance, the results of large federally funded studies, including CATT, IVAN, and AREDS 2, have been released at recent ARVO meetings.

The annual meeting of the American Society of Retina Specialists (ASRS), in contrast to ARVO, is more focused on clinical updates, including discussion panels on cutting edge and controversial topics moderated by key opinion leaders. Highlights include medical and surgical case conferences, special interest group lunches, instructional courses, the wine and cheese poster session, and the ASRS film festival. Optical Coherence Tomography & Imaging: Panel Experts Review (OCTIPER), a special CME symposium focusing on new advances in OCT technology, takes place on the Friday prior to the annual meeting. A scholarship fund helps facilitate fellow attendance by covering the registration fee and some travel expenses. More information is available at www.octiper.com.

ASRS has more than 2400 active members, and the annual meeting occurs each August. The large number of attendees and the timing set the stage for second year vitreoretinal fellows to connect with practices seeking

new associates. According to Allen C. Ho, MD, Director of Retina Research, Mid Atlantic Retina and Wills Eye Hospital, "A discussion over coffee at ASRS can be a great 'first date.' After you make a good impression, practices may offer to fly fellows with competitive resumes to their city for a second look." The ASRS annual meeting also has a program specifically designed for fellows on the hunt for a job. In 2013, the Fellows In Training Speed Networking session is scheduled for the evening of August 26. The ASRS matches practices' hiring criteria with potential associates' education, skills, and career goals to organize a series of 5- to 7-minute interviews.

Each winter, the ASRS offers an annual Retina Fellows' Forum, an educational and social experience during a weekend in late January in Chicago. Volunteer faculty help provide an interactive review of current practice patterns. Attendees are exclusively vitreoretinal fellows, a unique environment where you can spend time with your peer group with whom you will be colleagues for the rest of your career. Important real-world topics that may not be encountered in training programs are featured. Some sessions focus on the business of retina, such as billing and practice management. Another valuable

component is the introduction of industry interactions. Sponsors have the opportunity to exhibit new medical and surgical technologies, products that fellows may choose to incorporate into their budding practices. In addition, Dr. Regillo suggests, "Building relationships with leading companies in retinal pharmacotherapy and technology can be symbiotic. Many young investigators have initiated innovative studies that would not have been possible without industry support."

The annual meeting of the American Association of Ophthalmology (AAO), although not exclusively geared toward retina specialists, is nonetheless a critical event in meeting season. This grand summit is where ophthalmology meets, and it helps define the place of retina within the specialty. "Ophthalmic knowledge is expanding faster than ever, and educating our colleagues in other subspecialties is our critical duty," says Dr. Ho. "Reciprocity permits us to gain perspective we would otherwise lack." Particularly valuable are multidisciplinary sessions that focus on anterior segment issues commonly encountered by vitreoretinal surgeons. Subspecialty Day, which takes place during the days before the main event, is an additional opportunity for high-yield review of current trends in diagnosis and management.

In 2013, the Foundation of the AAO announced the introduction of the Sunil K. Rao Award, recognizing 2 vitreoretinal fellows each year who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in retinal disease. Winners receive financial support including complimentary registration for the AAO meeting, Retina Subspecialty Day, and Skills Transfer Course, a travel stipend, a voucher for educational products from the Academy Store, and an award certificate.

Attending annual meetings is a rewarding experience that can be one of the highlights of fellowship. This article discusses only the major yearly conferences, but many others are available. Each affords valuable opportunities for growth. Retina fellows should maximize the potential benefits of annual meetings because a few days can help accelerate the first few years of your career. ■

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