

Denver Reflections

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As I write this, we are 3 weeks out from finishing our 91st Annual Scientific Meeting in Denver. The leadup to the meeting was fraught with concern that we might have to cancel the meeting at the last minute due to spikes in COVID. My fondest hope was simply to get through the meeting without more adverse impacts from COVID. And that we did! While the final counts are yet to be tallied, we had around 970 registrants (normally over 1500). While in-person presentations went off well as usual, prerecorded presentations did have some hiccups, but to my knowledge were well received. It is yet to be determined to what extent we utilize pre-recorded or remote presentations at next year's meeting. It is one thing to simply provide virtual presentations, but quite another to recreate the human dynamic of people getting together. Despite Zoom and other virtual meeting platforms, I personally think these wonders of technology just do not allow for the same depth, spontaneity, fluidity, and multilayered nuances of in-person human interaction. We'll see how this all works out and figure out what we missed without the usual in-person attendance.

One area where virtual presentations worked very well were the plenary sessions. The Bauer and Armstrong lectures were both remote. Maj. Gen. (Dr.) Paul Friedrichs presented live from Washington, DC, on the "Urgency of Action," really hitting home the importance of avoiding institutional inertia and avoiding the gap between lessons learned and taking action on them. Serena M. Aunon-Chancellor (M.D., M.P.H.) spoke remotely on the future of science in low Earth orbit, especially noting the sheer volume of scientific experiments on her International Space Station expeditions and their relevancy to terra firma and for lunar and extended space missions. From a technical standpoint, both sessions went off smoothly, with only a couple of minor glitches in transmission. It was a bit ironic that the only live session was the Reinartz Lecture, presented by Anthony Wagstaff (Dr.Med., EMBA), who travelled from Norway. Needless to say, his lecture on the feedback loop of aerospace medicine and human performance seemed a bit more "intimate" since there was plenty of opportunity to speak with him in person immediately after the lecture and at other times during the meeting. I had the pleasure of joining Anthony and Dr. Eilis Boudreau in their discussion of a joint research project later in the week. That meeting was purely

serendipitous and unplanned and wouldn't have occurred in the more structured virtual meeting world.

I want to draw attention to events outside of the formal sessions that benefited from in-person attendance. In particular, the First Time Attendees/New Members meeting, "Welcome to Denver," Associate Fellows Breakfast, and Reception to Honor Multinational Attendees were not only well attended but also informative and great opportunities to share information and hear what our current and future members are doing. Honors Night was also well attended despite travel-related issues. It was a treat to see our award winners for 2020 and 2021 get formal recognition. These events are really the social "glue" for encouraging and fostering friendships, collegial interactions, and fellowship among people of like and disparate backgrounds, interests, and opinions within Team Aerospace. If there were more hours in the day, I'd spend them on the extra-session meetings and events to get to know more people one-on-one.

Tres Jefes: I think this is the only AsMA meeting that has ever had three Presidents. Because the May 2021 meeting was postponed and the May 2020 meeting (Atlanta) was cancelled, Chuck DeJohn was the official President meeting host and Joe "Bugs" Ortega was the Past-President co-host. It was a due honor to both Joe and Chuck for their leadership to the organization.

COVID vaccine boosters: For me it was a bit of a surprise that the U.S. Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) did not recommend universal third-shot boosters of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID vaccine at their mid-September meeting. My sense from informal discussion with peers was that approval was almost a done deal. And, to a certain extent, that decision may have bolstered the concerns of many who do not favor COVID vaccinations. However, I think the ACIP recommendations were exactly what we should expect of the scientific review process ... make unbiased and objective determinations



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PRESIDENT'S PAGE, *continued*

using the best evidence available, whatever that evidence is. No political, media, social, or business influences. The announcement regarding universal boosters seemed to almost overshadow the other half of the recommendations supporting a booster dose at least 6 months after the primary series in individuals 65 years of age and older, long-term care facility residents, persons aged 50–64 with

underlying medical conditions, and those aged 18–49 with underlying medical conditions. It would be nice if this heralded a durable shift to greeting advances in science and medicine without the hype and drama. But that is not the world we live in and we need for science to be able to “tell our story” in ways that are accurate, engaging, and honest about the good and bad.