

Reorganization of the American Academy of Allergy and Immunology—1987

The Academy has been growing healthily ever since its founding, growing not only in numbers of members but also growing in the complexity of the basic and clinical science of allergy and immunology. As a result, by the mid 1980s the size and diversity of the Academy's activities including the annual meeting had outgrown the capacity of the Academy's administrative structure to accommodate conveniently and efficiently our members' interests. Considering the annual meeting alone, there were too many abstracts, too much new information, too many concurrent sessions, so many people milling about in the hallways that it was hard to find friends and colleagues for those intimate informal conversations that are such a stimulating part of the meeting. And, more and more, one heard the old complaint, "the meeting is not clinical enough." In the meanwhile, changes were occurring in American society that greatly affected the very foundation of our members' practice of medicine. As a professional organization, the Academy needed to understand these changes, try to direct them into constructive channels, and assist its members in coping with them. Furthermore, a vague undercurrent of feeling existed that the governing body of the Academy, the Executive Committee, was an "old boys network" whose selection was not sufficiently democratic and who tended to support the interests of researchers more than practicing physicians. Between 1975 and 1985 a number of new committees had been appointed to deal with particular issues, the number of workshops and luncheon seminars increased to provide for practical updating for physicians practicing away from teaching centers, and the Joint Council was addressing socioeconomic issues quite successfully. But these changes were insufficient. The time had come for reorganization.

Therefore in January of 1986 the Executive Committee held a retreat to develop specific plans for a new corporate structure that would better meet the goals of the Academy. In addition to the members of the Executive Committee, those attending included several past Academy officers, officers of various state and regional societies, and other interested persons. After considerable discussion, correspondence, and follow-up meetings the reorganization plan crystallized. To implement the plan the Executive Committee

proposed a number of changes in the Academy by-laws, and the membership approved the changes in March 1987.

The plan organized the various working committees into two sets: administrative councils and scientific interest sections. The three councils are the Physicians and Public Service Council, the Research Council, and the Professional Education Council. The Physicians and Public Service Council consists of six governors elected by the state, regional, and local allergy societies membership. These governors elect one of themselves as chairperson; this person serves on the Executive Committee. Component committees of the Physicians and Public Service Council include the Medical Practice Service Committee (charged with practice development, governmental affairs, membership services); the Public Education Committee (charged with public education and public relations); Practice Standards Committee and Related Industry Committee. The Research Council directs the Academy's research activities. The Professional Education Council not only has heavy responsibilities at the annual meeting, but arranges for other educational activities between meetings. The six new interest sections include the following: Basic and Clinical Immunology; Asthma, Rhinitis, and Respiratory Disease; Dermatologic Disease; Environmental/Occupational Disorders; Food and Drug Reactions; and Mechanisms of Allergy. The chairpersons of the interest sections are elected by the Academy members who choose to vote in that section. The program committee of the annual meeting includes the president, president-elect, chairperson of the Education Council, and the chairpersons of each interest section.

Now five years have passed. Have these changes successfully achieved the goals? By and large, yes. Membership continues to grow; finances are sound; the diverse programs are flourishing. More of our members have challenging responsibilities, and the Academy has mechanisms for responding to new problems as well as the old ones. And the Executive Committee is continuing to implement the long-range plan for reorganization. The changes seem to be dealing with most of the criticisms except that members still grumble that the meeting is too hectic and complicated. But that's life.

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