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Specialization: The Most Important Fact for Planning your Future

One simple fact will determine your future as a neurosurgeon: the growth of scientific information is exponential, and it is occurring so rapidly that no one physician can keep up. (According to some estimates 50% of scientific knowledge is out of date in 7 years.) Therefore, you will never be able to keep current in all of the areas of neurosurgery. This may already be obvious if you are in your residency or in practice, either private or academic.

Once you accept this fact, what do you do? First, you must specialize in some area of neurosurgery. In addition, you should either join or form a group with other neurosurgeons or doctors so that you can command a larger market share for your specialized interest.

Many neurosurgeons have specialized in spine because that is the most common problem they see. Many other physicians, including orthopedists, are also choosing this specialty so professional competition has increased. One spine surgeon I know developed a “focused factory” where all he did was spine, and was very successful. Though such examples are encouraging, the future is more likely to reward those who develop multidisciplinary back pain and spine centers treating all phases of the disease—including psychological, surgical, rehabilitative, and pain management. Regardless of what happens to spine surgery in the areas of legislation or payment, you cannot lose because your multidisciplinary group will address all aspects of the spine patient.

A successful businessman told me the secret of innovation is to find out what everyone else is doing and don't do it. Look at the options available and find out how you can be unique. That is the way to look into the future.

Neurosurgeons and practitioners are getting into the “business” of medicine by own-

ing imaging facilities and outpatient surgery centers, and also by employing physical therapists and other specialists. Since payments are decreasing for professional work, one way to make up revenue is to develop other



aspects of the business, possibly by growing into a larger group. While there are risks to starting new ventures, you can find creative ways to support your plan if you can demonstrate a return on investment.

It may be easier for a younger neurosurgeon to join with a group than it is for a neurosurgeon who has been independent. If you are in a city with competing neurosurgical groups, consider collaborating to enlarge your market share and possibly merge your practices to achieve more visibility in your community. If you are in a remote area, you might associate with a larger group in a bigger city using your office as a satellite location. Your patients will benefit and you will have a greater range of experience in the referral group for problems you cannot handle. This is a win-win for both parties.

To get an idea of what is happening to the healthcare market, access the Johnson and Johnson web site at www.jnj.com and under “Our Company” on the home page, check “Fast Facts.” These facts describe companies with \$53 billion dollars in revenue each year, operating in 57 countries with 121,000 employees. Information such as this calls us to unite, to gain more visibility in the marketplace and to have national organizations that are powerful.

Remember the key to the future is specialization, and with that comes group practice—you see them forming all around you. Learning how these collaborations can work for you will help you plan your career.

I would be happy to answer your questions at jamesausman@mac.com. **CNSQ**