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Fifty Years of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons: Foundations, Objectives, and Legacies

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AS THE CONGRESS of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) approaches its 50th anniversary, we review the genesis of our professional society, the environment in which it was created, and the legacies it has established. The CNS was the first nonexclusive, international neurosurgical organization with no ostensible limitations to membership. From its unpretentious origins, the CNS has grown remarkably in size and scope, yet it has remained focused on its original primary objectives: education, the young neurosurgeon, membership, and volunteerism for the benefit of our specialty. During its 50-year history, the CNS has established a number of lasting legacies that have positively influenced the development and maturation of our chosen specialty.

Neurosurgery is unique in having benefited from two strong national member organizations to ensure representation of different generations and perspectives for policy-making, to provide for two comprehensive annual meetings and complimentary journals, to broaden the representation for neurosurgery in our interaction with outside agencies, and to minimize the cost of services provided on behalf of neurosurgeons.

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An appreciation of the contributions that the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) has made to organized neurosurgery and to the purpose and focus of our current activities and objectives requires an understanding of the historical basis upon which the CNS was established. The legacy of the CNS may be traced to our founders' wisdom in creating an education-oriented membership organization, driven by collegial volunteerism, and available to all neurosurgeons worldwide. The emphasis of the new organization was on promoting the science of the discipline of neurological surgery through education and on advancing and training younger neurosurgeons as well as those more senior. The genesis and evolution of the professional organizations in neurosurgery represent an interesting chapter in our profession's history and explain why neurosurgeons in 1950 set out to create a new, more member-friendly, more inclusive educational organization. Portions of this history were eloquently summarized by Hauber and Philips in *Neurosurgery* in 1995 (2). This chronology bears further elaboration here.

The first professional neurosurgical membership organization in the United States, the Society of Neurological Surgeons, was established in 1920. The original stated purposes of the Society were to develop the field of neurosurgery and to educate the medical profession in the idea that neurological

surgery requires special training (4). Although these were admirable goals, membership in our specialty's first professional organization was limited to 45 individuals, all prominent academicians of the time. Within a decade of the establishment of the Society, there were growing numbers of neurosurgeons who had no access to the educational and collegial activities of this membership association.

Between 1931 and 1948, three new national neurosurgical societies were founded, each in response to the burgeoning number of neurosurgeons who desired affiliation with a professional membership organization. Despite the good intentions of the founders of these new organizations, the Harvey Cushing Society (established in 1931), the American Academy of Neurological Surgeons (established in 1938), and the Neurosurgical Society of America (established in 1948), each had restrictions on membership that made them inaccessible to younger, less experienced, non-board-certified neurosurgeons. At the end of World War II, there was no single organizational forum in which all neurosurgeons could participate and belong. Hauber and Philips noted, "Existing societies placed a greater value on the professional and social intimacy that their limited numbers provided, than they placed on any sort of obligation to assist their juniors along the path of professional growth" (2).