New Committee Helps VA Surgeons Meet Unique Challenges

Vascular surgeons working with the Veterans Administration face unique challenges. To help meet them, the Society for Vascular Surgery created a committee specifically for those members.

The VA Vascular Surgeons Committee was the brainchild of Immediate Past President Dr. Bruce A. Perler, and the group held its first organizational meeting in January.

The group formed subcommittees to draft scopes of work and great progress has been made, said Dr. Robert Zwolak, chair of the committee. Their goal is to engage with VA leadership and enhance connections among VA vascular surgeons in hopes of increasing the ability to do vascular research and improve patient care. “Our members are really energized,” he said.

An important, upcoming project is a national webinar, tentatively set for early December, for all VA vascular surgeons to share needs, possible solutions and the new group’s insights and successes, Dr. Zwolak said.

Communication among the VA surgeons has already improved through a list-serve, created a year ago by SVS member and VA surgeon Dr. Vivienne Halpern. “Probably once a week someone will post a question and get answers and how to’s from around the country,” Dr. Zwolak said. “It’s been enlightening and points out again how many things are unique to the VA system.”

Also, the committee is pursuing research initiatives with the goal of improving patient care and also is reaching out to primary care providers. Dr. Gale Tang is creating a survey to determine the types of vascular research now underway at the VA, how to generate successful research grants and to identify which vascular questions might be most important to veterans with vascular disease.

Other committee members have created handouts and presentations for primary care physicians, including a module on peripheral artery disease created by Dr. Kristine Orion. These materials, which are educational as well as useful in helping primary care physicians know when or if to refer patients to a vascular surgeon, will be distributed to any VA vascular surgeon who wants them.

One blessing of working in a Veterans Administration setting is that “quality care and access to care are more
important than clinician productivity,” said Dr. Zwolak. “That's a refreshing perspective.”

He and other committee members are excited by the group’s work and focus. “We know we have many challenges,” he said “but our members have extraordinary experience, knowledge and insights, and we have helped each other by sharing them.”

(To see all of the SVS news from the November 2016 Vascular Specialist, please click here.)

Article Date: Tuesday, November 8, 2016
Author: (Re-posted from the November 2016 issue of Vascular Specialist)
Tags: Specialist
Article Type: Article