



SVS remains nimble in face of pandemic, pivots to focus on priorities and needs of membership

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BY BETH BALES

The Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) started 2020 with plans intensifying for the Vascular Research Initiatives Conference (VRIC) in May, the Vascular Annual Meeting (VAM) in June, the launch of the branding initiative and a host of other SVS priorities.

Within eight weeks, COVID-19 had prompted a rapid, decisive pivot to SVS members' changing and urgent needs. Members faced an upended practice landscape, with elective surgeries banned and financial concerns growing.

SVS president Kim Hodgson, MD, and executive director Kenneth M. Slaw, PhD, moved swiftly to work with leadership to address members' pressing needs. Four essential principles are being followed:

Listen and communicate: The important first response involved ears. "We knew that the most important thing was to listen and establish communications with those on the frontlines," said Hodgson.

In a few days' time, SVS increased the frequency of the Pulse electronic newsletter to weekly. Through the leadership of SVS secretary Amy Reed, MD, more immediate critical items were posted to *SVSConnect*. A members' resources page on the SVS website provides important information on a host of topics.

Hodgson instituted a series of Town Halls on topics members deemed critical. The Town Halls incorporate polls that highlight member concerns.

Legislative staff has closely tracked news and responses from Washington, D.C., highlighting the emergency COVID-19 legislation, waivers and the federal financial responses.

Rebalance priorities: The branding initiative has been a top SVS priority. A launch aimed at referring physicians was planned for the spring with a formal introduction at VAM.

That has changed. "We've completely shifted our priorities for this project to developing resources for the member toolkit," said Slaw. Nothing has been abandoned but simply re-tooled for the time being, added Hodgson.

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Members of the Program and Postgraduate Education committees already are planning to present some of the canceled VAM material online. "Our top two priorities are improving the quality of patient care and supporting our members," he said.

Plan ahead and be nimble: In late 2020, Slaw anticipated that at some point a situation could require the entire staff to work remotely. He took advantage of the holiday calendar and all staff worked away from the office on two separate days. "Our staff was already practiced and disciplined," he said. "Everyone is functioning well in the virtual world and continuing to meet members' needs."

Keep planning for the future: Noting that members are worried about furloughs, Slaw noted: "When the crisis subsides, a crush of patients will come back for delayed procedures. Planning is critical. Organizations need to be conservative and strategic in resource management, but not get into a position where you can't respond to an opportunity when this crisis is over."

The same holds true for the Society. "Our focus over the last several weeks has been to position the Society to come out of this in the best possible shape," said Hodgson.

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