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THE BRIDGE BUILDER

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expert skill that brings people together

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I'm always my own worst critic, but at the same time, that gives me motivation to try to make whatever it is that I didn't like better." S. Randolph Waldman, MD, pauses and reflects as he looks out the window of his practice's corner office. Satisfied with a quick mental rewrite, he continues, "I'm not one to sit back and say that I always have the right answer or that I can do it better than anybody else, but I'm one that will try to do it better."

Waldman has repeatedly applied this and other strong convictions throughout his career, and his life—from his role as a partner in the successful Lexington, Ky.-based practice Waldman-Schantz Plastic Surgery Center to self-styled "education mogul" within his own organization and the aesthetic surgery field in general. The latter achievement is best represented by the very successful and influential Facial Cosmetic Surgery Meeting—an annual scientific conference held in Las Vegas that celebrated its seventh year in 2011—for which he is the prime mover.

Board-certified in both facial plastic and reconstructive surgery and in head and neck surgery, Waldman is also a member of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS), where he has served in many board positions, including vice-president and a member of the Society's executive board from 1996 to 2000. In addition, he has authored a number of medical publications for scientific journals and recently was the editor for two medical books on facial plastic surgery.

A husband of 27 years, Waldman is a father of two daughters—one in medical school and another on her way—and a son in college. His wife, Marianne, is a registered nurse and has her own skin care practice in her husband's office.

Waldman has presented at scientific meetings around the world and chaired more than 30 multidisciplinary medical symposiums, but he is perhaps best known for his involvement in creating the Facial Cosmetic Surgery Multi-Specialty Symposium.



PHOTOS BY KIRK SCHLEA

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This meeting, which is held at the Bellagio hotel in Las Vegas in the summer, offers a cutting-edge program that brings together forward-thinking practitioners from various disciplines in an atmosphere of free exchange.

Without the encumbrances of being tied to a specific society, the “Waldman meeting” (as it has come to be known) avoids the politics and turf wars that can characterize competing aesthetic societies—the result taking place in an intensely structured but collegiate and family-type environment. Notably, this “family” has increased in number to more than 900 in 2011, with no sign of slowing down.

THE MEETING MAN

Waldman’s passion for education is the inspiration behind the symposium. He gives much of the credit for this to his late mentor, Jack Anderson, MD, who “taught me so much in the 1 year I spent with him and also showed me how really great educational meetings were set up and designed.”

During his fellowship year in 1982, he was also fortunate enough to travel with Anderson to Birmingham, Ala, and Key Biscayne, Fla, where he attended two outstanding aesthetic meetings given by Gaylon McCollough, MD, and Robert Simons, MD, respectively. “These were truly groundbreaking meetings in the genesis of facial aesthetic surgery,” Waldman says.

“My actual meetings management experience, however, really began as the chairman of the AAFPRS annual fall meeting in Kansas City in 1991,” he recalls. What would eventually emerge as the Facial Cosmetic Surgery Symposium had its roots in meetings started in Newport Beach, Calif, in the early 1980s by H. George Brennan, MD, FACS.

“I attended some of these early meetings as a lecturer,” Waldman says. “In 1993, Dr Brennan was considering giving up what was then a financially struggling but educationally sound meeting. He came to me after observing my involvement in the Kansas City meeting and asked me to help him organize, manage, and grow his meeting. That began my 14-year involvement with organizing and managing the program in Newport Beach. The meeting became much more successful in every way. Its educational reputation grew, as did the attendance.”

In time, Waldman decided to go in a different direction by further expanding the multispecialty concept. “There were no aesthetically oriented meetings in Las Vegas at that time, so we saw an



Waldman is keen on making his patients feel like they are part of a family.

“I’m a big believer in education—always have been, always will be, always try to make myself more educated. Our practice mirrors what we do educationally, and vice versa.”

opportunity,” he says. “The time was right to get the specialties together and to build educational if not political bridges between competitive specialties of dermatology, facial plastic surgery, plastic surgery, and oculoplastic surgery.”

During this period, Waldman formed the Multi-Specialty Foundation for Aesthetic Surgical Excellence (FASE) in 2002, intended as an educational meeting that would link what were at the time—and still are, to some degree, Waldman notes—very competitive specialties.

Physicians who helped Waldman with this strategy include Ron Moy, Ed Terino, Edwin Cortez, Donn Chatham, Gaylon McCollough, Rick Anderson, Gary Monheit, Corey Maas, Malcolm Paul, Bruce Connell, and Bob Goldberg. “Without

these men, I am not certain I would have had the courage to make this move,” Waldman says. In 2008, he encouraged Cortez, who was a lifelong friend and one of the members of the original steering committee, to co-chair the meeting.

In 2004, the newly christened Multi-Specialty Symposium was launched in Las Vegas and has since been an annual event—with the subsequent name changes—except for 2006. “In 2004 and 2007, I actually coordinated meetings in both Las Vegas and Newport Beach,” he adds. “And in 2005 I coordinated meetings in Newport and Las Vegas, and also the annual AAFPRS fall meeting in Los Angeles.”

Three meetings in one year? A bit of Waldman’s internal critic surfaces at this point, but, characteristic of him, it gets the humorous treatment. “Call me crazy,” he laughs. “Others probably have.”

The symposium has grown so large that it has crossed continents. “I think we had representation from 23 countries last year,” Waldman explains. “Not only are we getting more international attendees, but we are reaching out. We were invited by the Israelis to participate in a unique meeting between FASE and the Israeli Society of Plastic Surgery (ISPS). That was fun. In my opinion, it was the very best function that we’ve ever been involved with. Jim Shire and I, acting on behalf of the Multi-Specialty Foundation, put the aesthetic portion of the program together for them, and that was very exciting, taking American and European doctors over to Israel and to have them meet.

“We were very honored to be involved with the Israelis. They’re a class act, and I have nothing but great things to say about them. We know as well that the

Israelis are at the forefront of many of the technologic advancements in aesthetic medicine and, really, medicine in general. And I am happy to announce that a second American-Israeli meeting will be held again in November 2012.”

In bringing together these different disciplines, new symbiotic outgrowths have formed. “What we’ve been able to do is create enough of a bridge that not only doctors can get together independently, but now our Societies are taking a lead and extended a white flag to each other.”

For example, Renato Saltz, MD, an immediate past president of the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (ASAPS), took a strong interest in FASE and in Waldman’s meeting. “He is a very good friend of mine who had the courage and vision to look at what we were doing in Las Vegas,” Waldman says. “He decided to bring all these people to the negotiating table to see if they could start a core group comprised of dermatology, ophthalmology, facial plastic surgery, and plastic surgery. He wanted to get all four of these more political groups together in more of an educational environment. And maybe, just maybe, everyone can come together at a table and decide how can we all get along better, what can we do to help each other, and is there something jointly we can do better than separately?”

Out of those discussions, the Physicians Aesthetic Coalition (PAC) was formed. “They got together and said, ‘In the past, we may have had our disagreements, but in the interest of public safety and physician education, let’s get together and see what we can do for each other.’” This idea meshed well with Waldman’s vision. “That had never been done before,” he says. “And it’s not a small thing. It puts together societies that previously had not much to do with each other. It has fostered a better sense of educational cooperation and, now, maybe even some sense of political cooperation.”

After a discussion phase, PAC got together formally in the past year and became an endorser of the Facial Cosmetic Surgery Symposium’s program.

Adding to this success, Waldman always looks for ways to make the meeting even better. “To do a great meeting, I think you need to have a great staff around you that has a passion for what you’re doing,” he says. “You have to work on it every single day for at least a year before you do it. There’s not a day that goes by that we don’t spend a little bit of time doing something



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on that meeting. So, once the meeting is completely over, we’ll start again within a week planning the next one.”

Waldman makes an effort to not only attend meetings within his own specialty but go to meetings in other specialties. “It’s not unusual for me to go out and actually book guest speakers,” he says. “I want to find the very best educators, the people that don’t hold back anything. They’re effective speakers, and they can get their message across. We don’t just go by whether this person or that person is a highly placed political person in their specialty. We’re really looking for educators, people that can convey their message. That is how I put together faculty for our meetings.”

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Waldman’s high standard of picking top-grade people translates into his private practice, as well. “I think picking a staff is probably the hardest part of anything I do,” he notes. “You try to find people that are compatible not only with what you do, but with the other people that help you through it.”

How does he achieve this compatibility? “When I look at an application of somebody who’s moved every 6 months, they’re obviously looking for something, and they’re probably not going to find it with us,” he says. “That’s one of the things. And then just looking at their chemistry. How is this person going to interact with the other people we have on our staff? Are they going to fit in? I look for people who have been with other jobs for a while, or I look for people who are relatively new to the workforce and kind of what I consider untainted. And then we try to train them in the image that we want them to work with.”

A plastic surgery practice is foremost a medical practice, he says, but public

relations is a major key to success. “You have to be able to espouse the goals and image of the practice and how the doctor wants that practice to look. We’re probably a little less formal of a plastic surgery practice than some that I see. We try to have a really amicable relationship with all of our patients by trying to make them feel like they’re part of our family.”

Retaining a patient for the long term is Waldman’s measure of a successful plastic surgery practice. “It’s a lost opportunity when a patient leaves your office where they’ve gotten surgery, and go anywhere else for anything that has to do with our aesthetic field,” he says. “We offer injectables and skin care. That’s a way of keeping a person in your practice after you’ve performed a surgical procedure. We try to pick workers that can relate to our patients and that feel comfortable with the type of patient that we have, and they are personable and demonstrate the image of what we’re trying to portray. Those are the things we look at to hire people, and then we just try to treat them how we would want to be treated.”

Keeping with his appreciation for education, Waldman places an interesting prerequisite on employees. They should have a college degree or work at completing college. “I feel like that’s important, because I know that those people are concerned about education, and that’s really what we’re doing in this practice,” he says.

The spirit of education extends to patients, too. “When someone calls us on the phone, we want to educate them as to who and what we are, what we represent, what we do, and we think that the rest will take care of itself. Once we get them in the office, then as a physician I want to educate them about what they’re asking for and what they might be contemplating. I want to give them the pros and the cons, and I want to lay it out for them—I want to

be teacher at that point. I don't want to be a marketer. I want to educate, and I want my staff to do that.

"Every person that we sign up for surgery comes back for another hour-and-a-half session, where they sit with our nurse educator and they go over the procedure again. They're given 30-some pages of information, and it's like a classroom. We treat it like a lecture series, like a PowerPoint series," he adds. "We have videos to accent that. I'm a big believer in education—always have been, always will be. Always try to make myself more educated. Our practice mirrors what we do educationally, and vice versa. One feeds off the other. It's a philosophy that has worked and will become more prevalent going forward in the future."

As a real-world application of that philosophy, at the Las Vegas meeting Waldman and his team realized the concept of creating an educational function that would benefit and cater to not only physicians but to their office staffs, as well.

"We were the first to initiate a practice management and marketing symposium that would mirror the medical meeting," Waldman says. "In other words, it's a full 4-day meeting that is a complementary session."

These sessions, led by practice management and marketing experts, focus on online and social networking. "We try to be as contemporary as we can and provide the information that we feel the medical practices need to be successful. The practice of medicine is as much about your staff as about knowledge-related medical procedures, so I think they're complementary. Until you have a great staff in your office that can help you take care of patients, then it really doesn't matter what you can do. Educating your staff is as important as educating the doctor."

The approach is paying off. Physicians who attend the meeting also bring their office managers, office assistants, and/or nurses who flock to these business-oriented sessions.

BACKING UP

What about Waldman's beginnings and his education in the medical field? "I knew I wanted to be a doctor pretty early on," he says. "In medical school at the University of Louisville, my area of interest was the head and neck, and so I elected to do a residency in head and neck surgery at The Cleveland Clinic. From there, I became



Waldman demonstrates a Botox injection at the 2011 Facial Cosmetic Surgery meeting in Las Vegas.

interested in the reconstructive aspect of the specialty, and it was a gradual transition. I started to practice. I started as a junior associate in Denver, Colorado, for about 8 months in someone else's practice, beginning in 1982, but my wife and I were a bit 'homesick' and 'wanted to do our own thing.' So we moved back to Lexington in 1983; I basically came back home. I've been practicing in Lexington since that time."

Waldman's practice is located across the street from the University of Kentucky, so it makes sense that's where he would find Stephen A. Schantz, MD, his co-partner of close to 10 years.

"I'm a facial plastic surgeon, and he's a plastic surgeon," Waldman says. "That's somewhat of an unusual relationship. It's becoming more common in our field. I have at least five people a year who will call me and ask me how that relationship has worked out. They'll ask me, 'How did you arrange that contractually?' and I'll share what I've learned—even showing some people our contract."

The relationship as full partners has worked well. "I don't know that it would work for everybody, but it's worked for us," he says. "I don't do body contouring and he doesn't have any great love for the facial stuff, so we're not competitive with each other. Instead, we're referring each other patients and so, obviously, keeping the competition out of any relationship is the best way to make sure the relationship endures. The whole idea is to try to avoid not only competition of egos, but competition of actual work and financial competition. If you can limit all of that, I think you can have a successful relationship."

DAYS AT THE RACES

Waldman has brought people together for complementary relationships on a large scale—as with the Vegas meeting—and on

a smaller but even more significant scale in his personal practice.

Take his wife, Marianne. "I met her during my residency, and we've been a team ever since," he says. "I think it's the rare marriage that works long term when both people aren't somewhat involved in medicine. I think both people have to be involved in what we call the family business, which is what we call our practice."

Being in Lexington, Waldman enjoys horse racing but plays golf and loves to snow ski. He is also an avid sports fan. "Everybody in this part of the country is a fanatical Kentucky basketball fan. I count myself in that group from the time that I was 5 years old and on. And I would say that everybody in my practice can tell you the starting lineup for the University of Kentucky Wildcats. You can pretty much call anybody here and they can tell you. We can look out our window and see Rupp Arena."

When his three children moved on to college, the Waldman home acquired some new "kids" in the form of pet dogs. "For each kid that's moved out, we've replaced them with a dog. So, no empty nests here," he quips.

Waldman makes a practice of always keeping life interesting. "When you don't challenge yourself, that's why people get depressed. That's why they get bored with life," he says. "Present yourself with daily challenges, no matter what it might be, and then you try to educate yourself as to how to accomplish, to achieve what your challenge puts before you. Then, if you can do all that, then I think you'll be happy and successful, and life will never be boring." ■

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