

# From the President's Desk: Member survey meets our need to know, 4/14

**Gene N. Herbek, MD**

**April 2014**—Soon CAP members will receive the online Practice Characteristics Survey, designed to provide evidence of the value we contribute to health care and the many ways we serve our patients. This is the ninth time since 1994 that we have conducted this survey, which informs our policy, advocacy, and planning for member services.



**Dr. Herbek**

If every CAP member makes a commitment to complete and return the survey, the results will greatly refine and enlighten our work to serve, promote, and represent your best interests. But every is the key word. Each member has a role in building a robust response rate that will give our findings the depth and level of credibility that inform and educate.

Decision-makers in Washington are receptive to concrete, fact-based information. This survey will yield precise and meaningful data that our advocacy team can use to inform their thinking. The CAP Board needs reliable data to allocate resources and plan member services. We strive to ensure that the College acts in concert with its members' needs and best interests, but in any discussion, once someone makes an observation and others begin to repeat it, that observation can become more than a perception. The survey helps us to keep our conversations fact based.

CAP policy, advocacy, and member services must reflect and respond to the realities of pathology practice at the grassroots level. We do our best to represent our specialty before legislators and regulators; strategy is formulated and implemented accordingly. But we need your input to do it right. The 2014 Practice Characteristics Survey will tell us a lot about the nature and balance of pathologists' day-to-day activities and subspecialty interests. It will tell us how you are spending your time, how your needs are changing, and how practice settings and workforce needs are evolving.

This survey is as important to individual pathologists as it is to the CAP. All of us are interested in learning how our

practices fit into the national landscape. And new-in-practice pathologists and those looking for a new position will use the data we collect on income and benefits to evaluate the marketplace.

A project team created by the CAP Policy Roundtable (a subcommittee of the Council on Government and Professional Affairs) is developing the survey questions. The Policy Roundtable provides timely, objective data and policy analysis on topics that affect our ability to provide optimal care to our patients. The project team, chaired by Thomas Wheeler, MD, consists of a cross-section of members who are charged with creating a confidential instrument that can be completed in 15 minutes.

Taking the premise that a shorter instrument would simplify, clarify, and minimize the time required to complete it, Dr. Wheeler's group split the survey into two parts. The first—which targets individual members who practice full-time in the United States (excluding military and federal government employees)—will explore your professional activities, income, and benefits as individual pathologists. Later this year, a second survey will be fielded to a smaller cohort of members and practice managers who are involved with practice-oriented decisions, such as practice demographics, payer relationships, payment issues, and how groups are adapting to a transforming health care environment. The privacy of replies to both instruments is assured; an outside firm, The Jackson Group, will field the surveys, tabulate responses, and provide results in an aggregated, anonymized database.

The Practice Characteristics Survey enables us to show legislators, regulators, and payers not only what we contribute to the care of our patients and how we are adapting to an evolving health care environment, but how much of our time is allocated to various services and subspecialty activities. With a high participation rate, we will be able to identify the areas of anatomic, clinical, and subspecialty pathology that occupy specific proportions of our time. We will be able to track the level of activity in genomics, population health, and utilization management. We will know how many of our members are routinely engaged in direct patient care, and in what ways.

Finally, and if for no other reason, please respond to the survey so that we can document the Medicare Physician Quality Reporting System activities in which our members are engaged, the degree to which they are reporting on those activities, and how that information is provided to Medicare. And, please, if you are not participating in PQRS, tell us why.

The Practice Characteristics Survey can be used to raise the profile of under-the-radar contributions we make in our practice settings. For example, a question in our 2011 survey asked how often we were engaging in laboratory test utilization review, including how often we did so on our own initiative and how often at the request of ordering physicians. Survey results showed that 80 percent of pathologists were providing these services. Further, those who did so routinely or frequently acted more often on their own initiative than not, raising the baseline demand for test utilization management in their institutions. Utilization review—one of many services pathologists perform without explicit compensation or even recognition—is among the many ways we enable efficient, effective patient care. We know it—and with this survey, we can show it. □

To ensure that your institution's firewall does not block the survey when it arrives, members are encouraged to ask their information technology departments to specify that mail from "@qemailserver.com" be allowed to pass through their spam filters. □

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*Dr. Herbek welcomes communication from CAP members. Write to him at [president@cap.org](mailto:president@cap.org).*