An outsider's impression of the Williamsburg Conference

EDITOR'S NOTE: *I asked my administrative assistant to write this article about her impressions. These notes could apply to any meeting. The main point is that we physicians represent the medical profession wherever we are.*

As one of the women who helped at the registration desk, I was asked to write about my impressions of the conference. I was a bit intimidated about writing such an article. After all, I am just a recent college graduate in my first real job. Who am I to comment? I concluded that several of the physicians I have worked with might find it interesting to know what people like me take note of.

As physicians interacted with me at the registration desk, several were frazzled and would interrupt me or the other ladies in midsentence. They would talk over us and practically walk off as we were talking to them. The other ladies and I felt unimportant, but the physician was the one who looked unprofessional. By contrast, other physicians were in such high spirits that more than one spoke with us for a long time. I was able to meet fascinating people and hear wonderful stories.

While it was interesting seeing spouses and guests sneak into sessions, which were for registrants only, it was even more interesting to watch physicians sneaking out of the sessions! Leaving early may seem reasonable, but most attendees recorded the full number of continuing medical education hours. In addition, several presenters (who are paid an honorarium to speak and thus are not eligible for credit) claimed the meeting hours in their entirety. I was surprised, and the experience caused me to wonder: Are these physicians sometimes dishonest in other aspects of their profession?

At Baylor, the cardiologists and vascular surgeons appear to be extremely healthy; they "practice what they preach." That was not the case with all the physicians who attended the meeting. I saw an obese cardiologist taking a smoke break from a conference on heart disease. If I were a patient of such a physician, I would not have much confidence in his advice about making lifestyle changes to improve my health.

This was my first experience planning faculty dinners, obtaining travel schedules from the presenters, and preparing the syllabus. Quite a few of the presenters were efficient in turning in material for the syllabus, but others waited until the day the syllabus had to be sent to the printer or submitted nothing at all—even after numerous follow-up requests. The syllabus was not a popular item on the evaluations. Attendees wanted everyone's slides and not "publications that have nothing to do with the talk"; however, we could provide only the material we received. For the most part, the evaluations were very positive. Some people, though, always find something to complain about—the parking, the expensive dining options at the hotel, the crowds.

This program gave me a lot to think about and, more importantly, to learn. I know very little about cardiology, but I now know a little more about physicians in the field. Physicians are people just like everyone else, and they come from all walks of life. I think I speak for most of the attendees when I say that the conference was outstanding, and we hope to attend again.

—ANDREA BEGGS