The American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons and Surgical Education: What Does Your Society Do for You?

Judith L. Trudel, M.D.¹

¹ Department of Surgery, Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery, University of Minnesota Medical School, Saint Paul, Minnesota

Clin Colon Rectal Surg 2012;25:181–184.

Address for correspondence and reprint requests Judith L. Trudel, M.D., Department of Surgery, Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery, University of Minnesota Medical School, 1055 Westgate Dr., Ste. 190, Saint Paul, MN 55114 (e-mail: jtrudel@crsal.org).

Abstract

Keywords

- American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgery
- ASCRS
- professional society
- career
- membership

Since its inception in 1899, the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS) has been actively providing support for the education of its members specializing in colon and rectal surgery, general surgeons, surgical residents, and medical students. With new developments in surgical education, the ASCRS continues to offer educational tools and activities tailored to meet acquisition of medical knowledge and technical skills in an ongoing fashion throughout surgeons' careers, foster high-quality patient care, and promote the integration of the core competencies of communication skills, professionalism, system-based practice and practice-based learning, and improvement in daily practice. These tools and activities are presented in this article.

Objectives: On completion of this article, the reader should be able to: (1) list the educational opportunities offered by the ASCRS to its members and to nonmember physicians; (2) select the educational activities that best meet their individual educational needs for their level of training or in clinical practice; and (3) correctly match individual educational activities with the appropriate ACGME competencies, both for certification and maintenance of certification purposes.

The mission of the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS) is to ensure high-quality patient care by advancing the science through research and education for prevention and management of disorders of the colon, rectum, and anus (www.fascrs.org). In that context, education broadly refers to educating the lay public about diseases of the colon and rectum and about what constitutes quality care for those diseases. It also refers to educating health care professionals, in particular physicians and surgeons, about the cutting-edge medical knowledge, technical skills, and professional qualities necessary for providing optimal colorectal care. This chapter will address the education of health care providers, in particular surgeons.

The ASCRS Strategic Plan calls for developing a unified and integrated educational strategy to best serve all the educa-

tional needs of its members. Two of the main aspects of education are teaching and assessment. With the exception of CARSEP, the Society had traditionally been engaged mostly in teaching clinical materials, which were reflected in the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) core competencies of patient care and medical knowledge. The integration of the core competencies of interpersonal and communication skills, professionalism, system-based practice and practice-based learning and improvement into the residency curriculum and the recertification requirements has led the ASCRS to develop teaching and assessment tools to explicitly reflect all facets of quality patient care. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on current and developing ASCRS educational offerings for physicians and surgeons of all levels of training and clinical practice. Several of these materials can be adapted and used by students of surgery and trained colorectal surgeons alike. A description of these tools and activities is provided, with a description of their usefulness to different stakeholders.

ASCRS Annual Scientific Meeting

The program of the ASCRS annual scientific meeting is designed to provide participants with in-depth and up-

Issue Theme Surgical Education in Colorectal Surgery; Guest Editor, Judith L. Trudel, M.D.

Copyright © 2012 by Thieme Medical Publishers, Inc., 333 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10001, USA.
Tel: +1(212) 584-4662.

DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1055/s-0032-1322548>.
ISSN 1531-0043.

to-date knowledge relative to surgery for diseases of the colon, rectum, and anus. The emphasis is on patient care, teaching, and research. Presentation formats include podium presentations followed by audience questions and critiques, panel discussions, poster presentations, discussions, video presentations, and symposia focusing on specific state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment modalities. The purpose of all sessions is to improve the quality of care of patients with diseases of the colon and rectum.

The ASCRS is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) to provide continuing medical education (CME) for physicians. CME credits accrual is required for maintenance of certification (both in general and colorectal surgery), and by most states for licensure. CME credits are provided for attendance and participation in the annual meeting activities. The various sessions are coded by ACGME competencies (patient care, medical knowledge, practice-based learning and improvement, interpersonal and communication skills, professionalism, and system-based practice) to assist surgeons in identifying areas of interest for maintenance of certification.

Recently, the annual meeting has been webcasted on the ASCRS web page (www.fascrs.org), allowing attendees to review sessions of interest, and providing nonattendees an additional avenue for lifelong education. The webcasts are free of charge, but cannot be used for CME credits.

CARSEP (Colon and Rectal Surgery Educational Program)

Now in its eighth edition, the CARSEP Syllabus has been published by the ASCRS since 1981. Until 1981, the ASCRS had offered a self-standing self-assessment examination to its members every other year. There was no study vehicle available to identify one's areas of weakness to guide CME efforts.

CARSEP is a self-assessment instrument based on the major curricular categories from the American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery (ABCRS). It may be used in preparation for initial ABCRS certification or for the periodic ABCRS recertification examination. Equally important, it meets requirements for Part II of the process of continuous learning, self-assessment, and maintenance of certification.

The current CARSEP consists of 250 multiple-choice questions, a photo quiz, a pre- and posttest for self-assessment, answers, critiques, and references. It was published in 2011, and it provides enduring educational materials until 2015 inclusively.

The ASCRS is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) to provide continuing medical education (CME) for physicians. CME credits accrual is required for maintenance of certification (both in general and colorectal surgery), and by most states for licensure. Participation in CARSEP is rewarded by CME credits.

Diseases of the Colon and Rectum

Diseases of the Colon and Rectum (DC&R) is the official journal of the ASCRS. It is published monthly in paper and electronic

formats. It has been in print for 55 years. ASCRS members are automatically subscribed to both formats and can access it directly on the society's Website.

In addition to original scientific clinical and research papers in colon and rectal surgery, *DC&R* publishes specialized sections on Current Status, Selected Abstracts from the world colorectal literature, Dynamic Articles, Self-Assessment from CARSEP, and Media Reviews and Debates. In addition to the ASCRS Practice Parameters, special condensed articles on Evidence-Based Reviews in Surgery-Colorectal Surgery (EBR-CRS) are published regularly in *DC&R*. All these offerings help students of surgery and practicing surgeons to keep abreast of new developments in colon and rectal surgery, improve their critical appraisal skills, and evaluate their own practice against recognized benchmarks.

Maintenance of Certification, Part IV: Practice Performance Assessment

In close collaboration with the American College of Surgeons (ACS), the ASCRS encourages its members to participate in the ACS case log to demonstrate that they continuously assess the quality of care colon and rectal surgeons provide compared with their peers and national benchmarks. Participation in evaluation of performance in practice is a mandatory component of maintenance of certification. Access to the case log is available through the ACS Website (www.facs.org) or through the ACS link on the ASCRS Website.

ASCRS Textbook of Colon and Rectal Surgery

First published in 2007, the *ASCRS Textbook of Colon and Rectal Surgery* was intended as a definitive source of standardized information and guidance for colorectal specialist surgeons, general surgeons, surgery residents, and medical students. It is now used by most colon and rectal surgery residency programs as the reference textbook. A condensed companion version, called the *ASCRS Manual of Colon and Rectal Surgery* is available. The updated second edition of the textbook was published in 2011. The second edition of the *Manual* is in progress.

Evidence-Based Reviews in Surgery-Colorectal Surgery (EBR-CRS)

The Canadian Association of General Surgeons (CAGS) and the American College of Surgeons (ACS) jointly sponsor the Evidence-Based Review in Surgery program, whose objective is to improve practicing surgeons' critical appraisal skills. These reviews include modules devoted to colorectal surgery. Full versions of the modules are available on the ASCRS, ACS, and CAGS Websites (www.fascrs.org, www.facs.org/education/ebrs.html, and www.cags-accg.ca, respectively). Condensed versions of the EBR-CRS are published regularly in *DC&R*.

Participation in the EBR-CRS modules through the ASCRS Website is eligible for CME credits or maintenance of certification credits through completion of an evaluation and multiple-choice questions.

Practice Parameters

The ASCRS Standards Committee publishes at regular intervals evidence-based clinical practice guidelines in colon and rectal surgery. The goal is to define quality care in colon and rectal surgery and provide practicing surgeons with a benchmark against which to compare their own practice. All practice parameters are updated every 6 years on a rotating basis. Practice parameters are published in *DC&R*, and are available on the ASCRS Website (www.fascrs.org).

Core Subjects Update

Every year during the annual scientific meeting, half a day is devoted to updating core subjects in colon and rectal surgery. Twenty-four core subjects have been identified and are reviewed on a 4-year rotating basis. A core subjects update was developed to assist in the education and recertification of colon and rectal surgeons, and addresses the ACGME core competencies of patient care, medical knowledge, and practice-based learning and improvement. A written summary of each talk is available on the ASCRS Website (www.fascrs.org). Questions developed from each presentation are included in the ABCRS recertification question bank.

Teaching Technical Skills

The explosion of technological innovations forces modern surgeons to remain up-to-date with changes in existing instruments and techniques and to constantly learn new techniques to manage surgical diseases. ASCRS facilitates maintenance and acquisition of technical skills through dedicated workshops and hands-on courses, often held during the annual scientific meeting. Laparoscopy, advanced endoluminal and laparoendoscopy, robotic surgery, anorectal and pelvic ultrasound, transanal endoscopic microsurgery hands-on courses are regularly offered to participants, who are mostly practicing surgeons, although residents in colorectal surgery training may also register.

The CREST Project

CREST (Colon and Rectal Educational System Template) is a collection of online educational modules, which will be integrating all ASCRS educational materials in an interactive platform accessible to members. The plan is to have the *ASCRS Textbook of Colon and Rectal Surgery*, CARSEP, the Core Subjects, the Practice Parameters, ASCRS webcasts, pertinent journal articles, a slide and video library organized in topics/modules based on the *ASCRS Textbook* contents, and the recently revised Association of Program Directors in Colon and Rectal Surgery (APDCRS) core curriculum for colorectal residents. Several modules have been completed to date, with several more in the processing and planning stage. Once available, CREST will serve as a one-stop source for cutting edge medical knowledge, and will allow teaching of technical skills through videos and simulations.

The ASCRS Operative Competency Committee

The ASCRS Operative Competency Committee is charged with developing educational strategies to teach and assess technical competence. To do this, the committee chose to develop tools for ongoing formative assessment and for final summative assessment of colon and rectal surgery residents. This initiative has produced formative assessment instruments consisting of itemized checklists of steps critical to competent performance of a procedure, and a global rating scale of performance in defined domains of surgical performance for the following procedures: laparoscopic sigmoid colectomy, laparoscopic right hemicolectomy, low anterior resection, abdominal colectomy with ileostomy and Hartmann's closure of the rectum, endoscopic skills, and fistula surgery. These are available on the APDCRS Website (www.apdcrs.org).

As mentioned in this issue's article by Dr. Schoetz, the Colorectal Objective Structured Assessment of Technical Skills (COSATS) has shown promise in its potential usefulness for final summative assessment of colon and rectal surgeons, and eventually for credentialing and maintenance of certification. If this materializes, it could completely change the way colon and rectal surgeons demonstrate competence to their peers and the public. The ASCRS is determined to support the process of assessment of competence for its members.

Teaching Slides Library/Video Library

The ASCRS is in the process of updating and formatting its library of teaching slides to be made available to its members in the near future on the Website. Videos from the most recent annual scientific meeting are available for review online. Previously presented videos have been reviewed by the Continuing Medical Education (CME) Committee and will be integrated into the CREST project.

Support for the Association of Program Directors in Colon and Rectal Surgery and Colorectal Surgery Training Programs

The ASCRS is a steadfast supporter of the Association of Program Directors in Colon and Rectal Surgery (APDCRS) in numerous capacities. This support facilitates the realization of several of the goals of the APDCRS. Some of these stated goals include maintaining high standards of residency training and education in colon and rectal surgery by improving graduate education, encouraging research in the education and training of colon and rectal surgeons, and promoting and developing an academic interest in teaching colon and rectal surgery (www.apdcrs.org).

The APDCRS sponsors the annual Colon and Rectal Surgery in Training Exam (CARSITE) in the fall of each academic year. This web-based 100 multiple-choice questions exam is taken by residents enrolled in an accredited colon and rectal surgery residency program at the time, and used as an evaluation tool to assess a resident's progress.

In addition, every year the APDCRS sponsors residents' laparoscopic courses and a colorectal career course for residents enrolled in an accredited colon and rectal surgery residency program. These both serve as a venue to acquire/maintain technical skills and facilitate networking and career planning. ASCRS faculty members teach these courses.

In June 2011, the APDCRS published its updated core curriculum for residents in colon and rectal surgery. The curriculum follows the ACGME core competencies. It is available on the APDCRS Website.

Conclusion

The ASCRS offers a variety of educational activities and venues for physicians and surgeons of all levels of training and experience in clinical practice to meet their educational needs. The leadership regularly polls the members for sug-

gestions, and is open to considering informal suggestions from all stakeholders. This has allowed and will continue to allow the society to fulfill its mission to educate physicians and surgeons in colon and rectal surgery.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to Ms. Stella Zedalis, Associate Executive Director, ASCRS, for kindly agreeing to review this manuscript for accuracy and comprehensiveness.

Suggested Reading

Although there are no traditional references to support this article, the reader is strongly encouraged to visit the different Websites identified in the article to gain access to all the materials and activities available online.