Editorial

As an Observer of Interventional Radiology

Charles E. Ray Jr., MD, PhD, FSIR¹¹ Department of Radiology, University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System, Chicago, Illinois

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I recently attended a one-day hands-on interventional radiology (IR) symposium held at the medical college at Emory. I was there as an observer, and it was a meaningful experience for several reasons, and perhaps some type of theme will fall into place as I try to put my thoughts in writing. The event was all about gaining a hands-on experience, and there were no lectures – only welcoming comments by SIR leadership and an Emory mentor. The morning was then handed back to the students, who took off with it. They were all assigned to a work table staffed by one of the 17 vendors who were in attendance to show their wares, and rotated every 10 minutes or so to see all of the device manufacturers in attendance. The industry partners who showed up were an eclectic and diverse group. Everyone from Y90 vendors to suction thrombectomy vendors to embolization vendors and beyond were present. It was a full morning for these students and one I am quite sure they will not soon forget.

As an observer, I was struck by many things. First of all, the energy of the event was amazing. As one would expect, the students were anxious with anticipation to get whatever experience they could with the devices. I am convinced that there is nothing that sets the hook for our field like the tools and techniques that we use and perform. While we are all, appropriately, focused on moving our field into that of a more “clinical” identity, the procedures that we perform still define us. Personally, I see nothing wrong with this. If I wanted to be a physician who primarily works in a clinic, then I would have gone into family medicine or pediatrics (well, okay, maybe not the latter as adolescents give me the willies). The procedures that we perform have led to a multibillion dollar medical device industry, and the evolution of these devices is staggering. The excitement for learning about these procedures and the devices necessary to perform them raises a similar level of excitement for this observer as well.

Second, I was impressed with the dedication to learning about, and teaching about, what we do in our field. These students were not just Emory students, but they were students across Atlanta, across the state, and indeed across the nation. There were I would guess over 50 students

present, and some traveled from a distance great enough to require a plane trip. This was intended to be, I would guess, a local event but word spread widely through social media. It truly took on a life of its own.

It was not just the students who were dedicated to learning this stuff, but it was also the faculty mentors who showed up and were instrumental in teaching the next generation of physicians who were so impressive. One faculty member in particular, Zack Bercu, impressed me greatly. He was as giddy as the students he was teaching, and wanted to talk about the event in detail. He was, as all good teacher are, deflecting all kudos to the student organizers, but one could tell that his leadership in setting the event into motion was vital to its success. It was refreshing to see and energizing to watch. Another faculty mentor also was intimately involved in the planning process (Janice Newsome) also showed up as a practicing IR for the event. Remember, this was a Saturday morning, and time taken away from family and other aspects of their own lives. There was not a hint of regret at doing this, and while I would like to say that my response would have been the same had I been in their shoes, I have my suspicions.

Finally, there was the diversity of the students that I myself found exciting. There was diversity of gender and race, diversity of stage of their career with nearly all levels of medical student training represented (including one individual who had already matched into a diagnostic, not interventional, residency program). There was geographic diversity, as already mentioned. And lastly, there was diversity of education, with at least one engineering student in attendance. This was particularly exciting to me – the reach of IR going beyond our normal confines into the realm of engineering, business, nursing, whatever.

I fear that I have probably failed in getting my thoughts together in a cohesive manner. In fact, I'm not even certain how to title this missive. But the experience made me feel even more positive about the future of IR than I already was when I stepped through the doors. I did not think that was even possible – but I thank everyone who organized and participated in the event for that gift of observation.

Address for correspondence
Charles E. Ray Jr., MD, PhD, FSIR,
Department of Radiology,
University of Illinois Hospital and
Health Sciences System, 1740 W.
Taylor Street, Chicago, IL 60612
(e-mail: chray@uic.edu).

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Winokur, MD and David C.
Madoff, MD

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