

# 2011 ANNUAL MEETING AWARDS

## On Receiving The Hal Jayne Educational Excellence Award

James G. Adams, MD

I would like to thank those who nominated me for this Hal Jayne Educational Excellence Award. It is a career highlight for me. I must also thank all those at Northwestern, the faculty and residents, whom I regard so highly, along with my many other colleagues in Boston, at Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Harvard teaching hospitals, the military, the University of Pittsburgh, and Georgetown, whose influence has been formative. Of course I could not be here without the support of family and friends who mean the world to me. I would especially like to thank all of you in academic emergency medicine for being such great colleagues, for helping make this such a fulfilling career. It remains a great journey and it is an absolute pleasure to be on it with you, working hard work together, making the specialty better, striving to serve patients well.

It is now 20 years since I finished my residency. I recall the rise of EM in the 1980s, the specialty then only recently achieving solid ground. Emergency medicine was not necessarily predicted to succeed at its founding, but with perseverance and aspiration for excellence, it did succeed. Even though there remain threats and challenges, there is great talent in this room and in this specialty, so we are well-equipped to respond, adapt, and continue to succeed in our mission.

I am impressed now, in 2011, with the high esteem in which you are held by society and senior leaders inside and outside of healthcare. I am also impressed, I must admit, with how little others still understand of what we do. Even other physician colleagues do not have clarity as they spend less and less training time inside the emergency department. There is respect, but not insight. This is concerning. People seem to understand our rescue function, the need to expertly respond to patients with trauma, shock, and with STEMI who need their myocardium rescued. Less fully appreciated is our role in providing relief of pain, suffering, and distress, a major reason for understandable ED visits. Even more poorly understood is our role of discernment, the need to properly assess for subtle but serious underlying conditions. This last skill seems to be a principal, but perhaps under-recognized reason for our existence as a specialty.

This partial understanding of our role allows a national dialogue that is not of our making. It is frequently said that emergency care is too expensive and too often unnecessary. Lyndon Johnson said this; Bill Clinton and George Bush also said it. I suspect that President Obama will soon say it as well. And still ED visits have increased through the decades. That emergency care is only between 2 and 4% of US healthcare expenditures is notable but insufficiently known. Our facilities are seen as expensive and overused, even though it is insured patients with real needs who predominantly fill our hallways and our waiting rooms. The notion that there is excessive, unnecessary care neither solves nor satisfies anything. It hasn't in almost 50 years.

Although emergency medicine is incompletely understood, it is, admittedly, highly regarded. Although the larger US healthcare system is not viewed as the best in the world for its citizens, the emergency care system is. There is clear international consensus that the US emergency care system is indeed the best in the world.

Now, in 2011, with confidence in our quality, we need to begin to control the narrative. We must enable others to more fully understand our role in rescue, relief, and discernment. There are no other sites better skilled, better equipped, or better organized to achieve these goals more efficiently or effectively. We do not seek patients who can be well served in another setting. We simply do not want patients harmed in the process of trying to get them there.

Our message is an optimistic one, a welcoming one, an ambitious one. True to our values of service and excellence, we will continue to improve in clinical care, in education, and in research. In this work I have found my calling; in you I have found impressive colleagues and good friends. Through your talents and your leadership we will surely continue to advance. Thank you for this wonderful career. This award today is great recognition, and I am touched by it. I thank you for all you have done for me, both today and throughout these many years. I am deeply grateful.

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