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International exchange through scientific meetings enhances international understanding and friendship. Recently, restructuring of the International Society for Cardiovascular Surgery (ISCVS) and its Chapters into a World Federation of Vascular Societies has resulted in suspension of the annual scientific meeting. At the same time, the American Association for Vascular Surgery (AAVS, formerly North American Chapter, ISCVS) and the Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) have merged to become a single vascular society, the Society for Vascular Surgery. These events left a vacuum in international exchange for American surgeons with other countries. In order to overcome this shortcoming, we have initiated a new way to improve international exchange by means of a scholarship programme and also to expand membership in the SVS to include qualified vascular surgeons from abroad. We envision that the scholarship programme will serve as an outreach programme to younger vascular surgeons from developing countries. We hope that these new initiatives will attract the interest of Asian vascular surgeons to participate in the exchange.

Under the advisory of the International Relations Committee chaired by Gregorio Sicard with six members (Jack Cronenwett, Peter Gloviczki, Enrico Ascher, Anthony Whittemore, Anton Sidawy, Craig Kent), SVS has established an International Scholar Programme. The programme provides scholarships to qualified young vascular surgeons from countries other than the United States and Canada to participate in the SVS annual meeting and to visit centres of excellence in North America. Five scholarships in the amount of US$7,000 each will be granted annually. At the June 2007 meeting, five young surgeons from India, China, Turkey, Greece and Colombia were selected and they attended the June 2008 annual meeting in San Diego. We thank W.L. Gore & Associates, Inc. for a generous grant to support two of the five scholars.

The other initiative by SVS is the creation of a new category of membership for international surgeons and international chapters. The International Membership will be granted by SVS to surgeons residing outside of the United States and Canada who have demonstrated knowledge and skill in the diagnosis and management of vascular disorders. International members of developing countries will pay membership fees of US$150 and will have the same privileges as regular members to access the education, research, practice, and professional resources provided by the Society. Countries with at least 15 international members may request permission to organize an International Chapter. Once a Chapter is formed, SVS will entertain the possibility of Chapter meetings in the host country. In the June meeting this year, SVS granted International Membership to 32 surgeons from India. Under the direction of Dr Kumud Rai, President, the Vascular Society of India is now in the process of working with SVS to establish an International Chapter in India.

At Northwestern University, the Division of Vascular Surgery, Feinberg School of Medicine has also initiated a Visiting Scholar Program. The programme is supported by a generous education grant from Atria Foundation, a private nonprofit organization with the mission of promoting international exchange. The Foundation supports two types of Visiting Scholars—the Senior and Junior Scholar. The former is a 6-week visit reserved for surgeons at the rank of Professor. The scholar will be based at Northwestern University and will visit four to six centres of excellence of his or her choice. The Senior Scholar is also encouraged to attend national or regional vascular meetings and the Northwestern Vascular Symposium. The Junior Scholar programme is for young academic surgeons who are at the rank of Assistant or Associate Professor with a commitment to pursue academic surgery in their own institution. The visiting period is no more than 3 months. He or she will stay at Northwestern and will have the chance to visit two other centres of their
choice. They are expected to participate in all clinical and academic activities of the Division of Vascular Surgery. Training courses for endovascular technology sponsored by the Division, national or regional vascular meetings, and the *Northwestern Vascular Symposium* are also made available for the Junior Scholar. We envision the exchange programme as a two-way exchange and we expect the visiting scholars to bring their expertise for us to learn about their vascular surgical training, surgical practice, and vascular disease of geographic interest and significance. As of 4 September 2007, Dr Rai (President, Vascular Society of India) and Professor Weiming Lu, of Sun-Yat Sen University Medical School, are our senior visitors at Northwestern University.

Atria Foundation supports international exchange through the scholar programme, meetings and seminars, and an ambassador programme to enhance international understanding via people-to-people contact. In the future, Atria Foundation, in cooperation with Northwestern University, will develop and support an ambassador programme to coincide with International SVS Chapter meetings in the host country.

Peripheral artery disease is a global health problem. We hope that these two new initiatives in vascular surgery will unify vascular surgeons worldwide to reduce stroke, rupture of aortic aneurysms, and organ or limb ischaemia due to arterial blockage. In the era of globalization, we realize the importance for America to maintain a leadership role in international exchange on research, education, and the practice of vascular surgery. These new initiatives will promote people-to-people contact and people make the difference when governments cannot. Asian surgeons are invited to use the following websites or e-mail addresses for further information.

**International Membership**
http://www.vascularweb.org/_CONTRIBUTION_PAGES/SVS_Membership/Categories_Membership/international_membership.html
OR
E-mail: vascular@vascularsociety.org

**International Scholar Programme**
http://www.vascularweb.org/_CONTRIBUTION_PAGES/Awards/International_Scholars_Program/International_Scholars_Program.html
OR
E-mail: vascular@vascularsociety.org

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