# CAP at 75 - Commemorating a Rich History

October 8, 2021

**Julie McDowell:**

Welcome to the CAP's CAPcast series, celebrating our 75th anniversary. This episode's discussion will feature Dr. Paul Bachner, who served as president from 1999 to 2001, and Dr. Bruce Williams, who served as president from 2017 to 2019. During Dr. Williams' term, the board approved an update of the CAP's history for its 75th anniversary, as the last book was published in 1996 for the CAP's 50th anniversary. Dr. Williams asked Dr. Bachner to author the book, and he graciously agreed. I want to start off by talking about why writing this book was so important to the both of you. Dr. Williams, can we start with you?

**Dr. Bruce Williams:**

Well, sure. There's so many wonderful memories and activities that happen when you're a member of the College of American Pathologists and participate in all the committees and activities of the college. One of the ones that stood out in my mind over the years was in 1996 when I did receive a copy of a book called 'The Pursuit of Excellence: The College of American Pathologists', 1946-1996, I was very excited to get the book. I received it and read it over a weekend. It's not very long, but it's just jam-packed, full of information that really opens some insights into me, into what the college had been through and the members had done.

It was authored by Lord Wagner, who I knew, who was also a previous president, and he did an excellent job, and I always thought the world of Lloyd, but after this, I even thought more of him. And there were many other authors in here too. Two of the only ones that stood out to me were John Duckworth and Bill Hamlin, who were both part of the accreditation program, which I grew up in, the college and the accreditation program.

To read the history after hearing from both of these people and others about what had happened over the years really meant a lot to me. And as I became president, I realized the 75th anniversary wasn't too far away; and I was thinking, it's a shame we don't need to wait another 50 years for history. So much has gone on in the last 25. We really need to update that book. And I don't know that anybody else had the idea, but that really meant a lot to me, and I went to the board and talked to them about it. They were very supportive of that. And I could think of no one better than Paul to take over this task, and he's thrown himself into it and come up with a great book to update the 50th anniversary.

So that's why I did it, because the 50th meant so much to me. I hope that 75th means as much to all of our members as the 50th did to me.

**Julie McDowell:**

Dr. Bachner, can we hear from you on why you think it's important to capture the content related to the 75th anniversary in the book that you author?

**Dr. Paul Bachner:**

Well, history is always important, not only in order to understand the present, but perhaps to prepare for the future. As Bruce says, the previous book, written and edited by Wagner, was a superb history. I reread it prior to starting my activities with the current version and learned a great deal. I had known Dr. Wagner, he had been one of my mentors, and I had great respect for him. And although in planning the new book we did a few things somewhat differently, he certainly set a model for the new book. And so I've attempted in putting the book together, and I've written a goodly part of it, but several other people have made major contributions to the book and to chapters.

In putting the book together, the challenge was to recapture some of the past. The earliest chapter in the book, the opening chapter, is essentially a reprise, if you will, of the first book, sort of a reprise of the first 50 years. And then the book is heavily oriented around the missions of the college: quality, laboratory improvement, advocacy, education and membership services. And those four pillars, if you will, were the skeletons around which the book was conceived and written.

**Julie McDowell:**

Dr. Bachner, what would you say you most enjoyed about writing this book?

**Dr. Paul Bachner:**

Well, it's hard because I enjoyed many things. I'll start with, I enjoyed finishing the project. The project took a lot of work, a bit more than Dr. Williams told me in the beginning, but I must say it was truly a labor of love. There were many things that I enjoyed.

I'll start by saying the first staff leader for the book was Liz Kramer, who is no longer with us. And Liz played a major role in getting us started, and her untimely demise came as a shock, but other members of the staff stepped up to the plate. And I must say one of the things I enjoyed the most was working with Mary Kay Kraus, who took over from Liz, with Drew Davis, who's the CAP archivist, and an outside writer and editor, Jim Crowley. Nancy Johnson also was a great help in putting together the chapter on the CAP's response to the COVID epidemic. And Dr. Karcher, who is now the president elect of the college, wrote the chapter on advocacy.

But I think what I probably enjoyed the most was working with other members and other staff who provided material for me. And sometimes the material was merely a conversation about some aspect that I was interested in portraying, or sometimes in providing excerpts and segments of the book. So it was a multifaceted process for me, and it took almost three years, really, to have this happen, and it was a daily adventure for me. But now that I'm essentially retired, it kept me off the streets and thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it. I hope that the final product, which I think is in press right now... I know that an electronic version is available to our members, but I do hope that the final product will live up and fulfill all the time and effort that went into it.

**Julie McDowell:**

In looking back over the past 75 years of the CAP, what do you think we've learned that can inform where we go from here? Dr. Williams, can you share your perspective on this?

**Dr. Bruce Williams:**

Well, I think one of the things that you have to do, a couple of things, is you've got to be true to your mission. I think we are strongest in the areas that we have the most expertise, whether it be accreditation, laboratory improvement, education, advocacy. And I think if you keep within your expertise, then the products that will come out will reflect that and that you come out with excellent products. And the college has been blessed by numerous staff and volunteers over the years who've worked jointly to produce products that have been really outstanding for pathologists and for the field of laboratory medicine. And I think if we do that, you can see from the history of how that evolves and how that comes about. I think that's a great template for those moving forward in the future, is to work collaborative, staff and members. I think that's really our biggest strength of the college to...

So we're blessed by so many great staff in Northfield and Washington, and we have so many volunteers from across the United States, really around the world, that are experts in their fields and that can produce products that are so beneficial to the pathologists and to medicine in general, and ultimately to benefit the patient. And I think if we keep that as a template, which we can learn from our history, it's something that would be very useful going forward.

**Julie McDowell:**

Dr. Bachner, what are your thoughts on this?

**Dr. Paul Bachner:**

Well, Dr. Williams hit the nail on the head when he commented that the important thing to remember always is to stay true to our mission. You've asked me for comments about 75 years. Well, despite the gray hairs that I have, I can only speak to 50 years, not 75. I missed those.

But again, the college is a unique organization. It is a professional organization in the sense that it serves the needs of our members in terms of advocacy and education; but it also has this huge laboratory improvement on with laboratory accreditation and proficiency testing, which is essentially the organizational and financial engine that supports so many of the college's activities. And keeping these two arms, if you will, working in a productive and synergistic manner sometimes is a challenge, which I think the college always seems to meet. The unique feature of the college is the intense engagement by a huge cadre of highly intelligent, knowledgeable, practicing members supported by the terrific staff.

**Julie McDowell:**

So 75 years from now, when someone reflects on your era, what will you say was your unique contribution to the CAP and to pathology? Dr. Williams, what are your thoughts on this?

**Dr. Bruce Williams:**

Well, I think 75 years from now, not very many people be thinking of me and Paul, unfortunately; but I think really the contribution that we give is the contribution that all members give throughout the time. You have to meet the challenges of the time as you see them and address them and try to solve them to the best of your ability, to the benefit of a pathologist and to medicine and to other physicians and to the patients.

I think, again, with keeping that in mind, what they'll think back is that we were a strong organization over the past 150 years, that we've had numerous members. Some remembered, most not, but at their time, they produced the product, the work that actually moved pathology forward, that moved medicine forward, and that we continuously kept up to date and continuously kept improving the practice of pathology. And I think that's the greatest legacy for the college in the future, is that during that 150 years, we never stopped improving, we never stopped trying, we never stopped advancing the practice of pathology.

**Julie McDowell:**

Dr. Bachner, what do you have to say to this?

**Dr. Paul Bachner:**

Well, again, to the extent that anyone will remember specifically my time as president and Dr. Williams' time as president, I think I can take some pride in being able to say that nothing terrible happened as a result of anything that I did, and I can say the same for Dr. Williams. From a personal standpoint, when I look back on my two years as president, what I look back on with the most pride is starting the process of making education a freestanding, independent arm, if you will, of the college rather than just a support mechanism for laboratory improvement programs.

On a personal level, the Q-PROBES program was something that Peter Howanitz and I developed many, many years before my presidency, and he was, I think, a very major part of pathology for many, many years and still is. It was a program designed to help pathologists, in the beginning, to meet certain joint commission accreditation requirements, but turned out to be a management tool of great usefulness. During my years as a lab director, I found Q-PROBES very helpful in managing a large academic laboratory.

**Julie McDowell:**

So finally, to close out, I'd like to hear from both of you about what advice you have for up-and-coming leaders. Dr. Bachner, can we start with you?

**Dr. Paul Bachner:**

Well, I'm taking the word leader in a very broad sense. I think you're talking not just about being president, but about being an officer or a member of the board, or more importantly, the engine of the college, the committees and the councils. So my sense of leadership is a very broad one. And, again, this has going to sound sort of basic and nothing really new, but obviously you have to set an example. Example in terms of behavior and your own personal behavior in your own dedication to the tasks that you're dealing with. The college is blessed with an incredible knowledge resource base in our committees and councils. And I think any leader has to recognize the importance of listening more and talking less and taking advantage of the knowledge base and the experience base that's out there.

And then the other piece of advice is always to work closely with staff. The members come and go, presidents come and go, leaders come and go, but the staff is always there; and for us to achieve, as leaders, our goals or aspirations, the day-to-day heavy-lifting is done by our staff. It's important for all leaders to work carefully with them.

**Julie McDowell:**

Dr. Williams, what's your advice for up-and-coming leaders?

**Dr. Bruce Williams:**

It's very similar to Dr. Bachner's. As usual, I think he's also hit the nail on the head. But there are two sets of leaders, as Paul mentioned. There's the staff leaders and the member leaders. The staff leaders, in my tenure, I only had two: Charles Russel and Steven Myers, and they both did a great job. And I think one of the strengths that they both have is willingness to work with members. The college is different than a usual business in that there's really two sets of folks helping run one organization, and they're very distinct and very different, as Paul said. The staff works daily to improve the college. Members work sometimes daily, but mainly periodically at their committee meetings or telephone calls in between in order to help guide and produce the material that makes the college very excellent.

So from the professional side, from the leadership side, my advice is a couple of things. One is to work closely with staff because without the staff, you can't produce anything. That's not our day job. The staff is very excellent and very technically oriented and good at what they do. So that's one bit of advice is work closely with staff. Another one is don't be satisfied. It would be easy to come in and keep on keeping on, maintain what's happened up until then. If we're going to improve, you have to think outside the box, you have to think strategically, and you have to think forwardly as to what is the current needs that are not being met? What could be some potential future needs that we need to start getting ready for? And that happens all the way down to the committee members.

A lot of things that come out of the college that are very good start at a committee meeting. And it's not the leadership per se. It's the members who have heard something new or learned something new and think the college ought to be involved with it. And it takes a while to work its way through the committee and up to the council and then finally to the board. Work can be voted on and done.

But as Paul said, the committee leaders then, and the council leaders and the board and the president, have to listen: have to listen to other members, have to listen to their expertise in the fields, and listen to what advice they're being given. And so not only do they have to think forward, but they have to be active. You can have all sorts of good ideas, but you have to actually produce something, and that sometimes is the hardest thing to do. I may have snookered Paul into doing this by saying it'd be an easy ride, but it took three years. But it does take time to do something good. It takes a long time to come up with something worthwhile. It takes a lot of hours and days and years to work through something to come up with something of quality that is not always recognized in our field in America, but around the world as being an excellent product in the field of pathology.

So you have to be able to work. You're not going to have to be able plan, but you have to be able to produce what you're thinking of. And so my advice to leaders is to enjoy your time in the college. It's a wonderful place to volunteer. It's got a great purpose. It's got great folks you get to know and are friends your entire life, like Paul and I. But you also have to then be dedicated to doing hard work and to actually producing a great product. And that's the way you get to be remembered. Maybe not you individually, but the college or the next total of 150 years.

**Julie McDowell:**

Thank you, Dr. Bachner and Dr. Williams, for this great discussion. CAP members can download the 75th anniversary history book authored by past President Dr. Paul Bachner on cap.org.

Please visit cap.org and type in "75th anniversary" into the search function at the top of the site to find the link to the book download page on the CAP's e-store.

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