



EXCELSIOR SURGICAL SOCIETY

Dear Colleagues,

Now more than ever military surgeons need to rely on one another and on opportunities within the Excelsior Surgical Society (ESS) as a way to weather tumultuous times and optimize professional wellness. Reliance on colleagues is a hallmark of our “one team, one fight” ethos which, along with support from civilian mentors and professional organizations, led the way to [maximizing care](#) for service members during the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. While it seems obvious to state that we are stronger together, events within and outside of the Military Health System (MHS) pose what Dr. Knudson referred to in her [Scudder Oration](#) as a perfect storm that risks fraying our professional ties and even our shared commitment to service.

As stated in our September [JAMA Surgery perspective](#), the drawdown of combat operations in Syria and a peace agreement in Afghanistan raises real questions about how military surgery should function during this time of low combat intensity. Reports of the DoD-proposing to [cut 18,000 medical billets](#) and a DoD Defense Wide Review that [questions the value of its own medical system](#) follow on the heels of a series of U.S News articles that gave a [raw account](#) of the state of military surgery. The MHS seems stuck amidst a congressionally-mandated transition, a process openly [opposed by the highest levels](#) of military leadership. Are we as surgeons aligned with DHA-operated military hospitals, or is our commitment to Service-aligned units that deploy us for long periods with no clinical activity or regard to [its impact](#) on our professional viability?



[The Excelsior Surgical Society](#), an organization whose founding after World War II was intended to mitigate the insidious effects of peacetime on excellence in military surgery, is [ideally positioned](#) to do the same 75 years later. Given the importance of the society today, we are indebted to leaders in the MHS and in the American College of Surgeons (ACS) who at the time had the prescience to [rejuvenate the organization in 2014](#). Since then, the newly energized society has matured to provide opportunities for camaraderie, engagement, and resources on skills sustainment and professional growth.

Moreover, the policy efforts of the society are paying off. Solution sets for the most pressing challenges facing military surgeons have been developed, including *The [Blue Book on Military-Civilian Partnerships for Trauma, Training, Sustainment and Readiness](#)* as well as the [Clinical Readiness Program](#) (i.e. the KSA effort). The priorities curated and promoted by the society are being heard and reflected in [Public Law](#) and [DoD Instruction](#). With initial successes in mind, now is no time to take our foot off of the gas. Now more than ever the society needs membership engagement to develop new and implement existing solution sets. Through these efforts and as an integral part of the MHS Strategic Partnership with the ACS, the Excelsior Surgical Society can serve as a major bulwark against the [peacetime effect](#).

Building on a successful year under the leadership of CAPT (Dr) Gordon Wisbach, LTC (Dr) Danielle Holt and I aim to expand the inclusivity, reach and relevance of the society. While strong, the society lacks the [diversity of our patients](#) and the [teams with whom we deploy](#). We intend to work through our six committees and with existing and potential members to make the gender and racial composition of the society more reflective of our students, trainees and fellow service members. As a way to increase reach and relevance we are initiating monthly webinars starting in November that will feature leadership updates with Q&A sessions, a report from our [committees](#), and a speaker who will tackle a real-world topic of importance



to membership. In addition to serving as a recurring venue for information exchange, Dr. Holt and I hope that the webinars will increase the value of the organization to its members.

I encourage you to join with me, LTC (Dr) Holt and the society's terrific staff in our effort to grow and fortify the organization in the coming year. In addition to connecting with the webinars and through other social medial platforms, please consider ways to engage one of our [committees](#). You can also contact [me](#), [Dr. Holt](#), or the Medical Director of the MHS Strategic Partnership, [Dr. Peggy Knudson](#), to make your challenges, successes and ideas known and to find ways to get involved.

As military surgeon and founding member of the ACS Dr. [George Crile](#) said in the [6th Convocation Address](#) in October of 1917: "We have it in our power to bring more fully this College into the National Defense in peace as well as in war." More than 100 years later this goal is more important than ever and the Excelsior Surgical has a major role to play in seeing it to fruition. I am honored to serve as your president for the coming year and I look forward to working with you to press this vital mission.

Sincerely,

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