The International Anesthesia Research Society Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic Scientific Advisory Board: Supporting a Pandemic of Positivity

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GLOSSARY
COVID = coronavirus disease 2019; IARS = International Anesthesia Research Society; SAB = Scientific Advisory Board; SARS = severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2

Since Chinese authorities first reported cases of the novel coronavirus in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has revealed the best in anesthesiologists. The commitment of anesthesiologists to patient care, their boldness and selflessness in providing that care, and their innovative and resourceful spirit have been recognized and acknowledged worldwide. Over the past year and a half, we have witnessed repeated examples of these exemplary characteristics. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has further galvanized the profession’s resolve to increase global access to high-level critical care and to improve the acute and long-term outcomes of severely ill patients.

Underlying the daily tragedies and demands of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a quiet, yet forceful “pandemic of positivity.” This positive pandemic refers to the actions of our colleagues who have stepped up in unexpected and unprecedented ways to support their patients and their peers. Such positivity has not been associated with any sense of joy. Indeed, for those who have lost family and friends, as well as for those who have been working in the emergency departments and critical care units, grief remains just below the surface. Rather, this positivity refers to a powerful force that is motivated by the selfless actions that put wind in our sails and propels us forward through these difficult times.

One outstanding example of such positivity has been the contribution of the International Anesthesia Research Society (IARS) COVID-19 Scientific Advisory Board (SAB).

Early in the pandemic health care providers faced the challenge of caring for COVID-19 patients with little information about the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus and its manifestations. However, by the middle of March 2020, information was becoming available at an astonishing rate, which created new challenges for health care workers: the need to sift through that information to find what was most important to their clinical practice. To address this challenge, the IARS recruited a SAB from a select group of retired members, along with physicians from other relevant medical specialties including pulmonology, cardiology, and intensive care medicine. A dozen physicians readily stepped forward to volunteer their time and expertise. The group’s mandate was to review all of the biomedical literature that emerge each day in the National Library of Medicine’s PubMed database, extract the publications of direct relevance to providers on the front lines, and then review, summarize, and categorize the relevant articles. From this content, the IARS built a database and a website then launched an e-newsletter to push the information out to the IARS community.

The SAB group met for an hour or more 6 days per week, from the end of March until June 2020, to discuss and curate the emerging literature but also peer-review the reports. SAB members spent their time between these daily meetings analyzing new articles for their relevance. The group quickly developed an...
algorithm and a set of guidelines to help them manage the enormous amount of scientific content available so they could rapidly disseminate the information to the IARS community. Only materials that would help understand the complexities of SARS-CoV-2 virus-related illness and the effectiveness of the available treatment option were considered. With these new management tools, the SAB was able to reduce the frequency of the review meetings to 3 days per week; a schedule they maintained throughout the remainder of 2020 and the first half of 2021. As the information needs of front-line providers shifted through the early phase of the pandemic and its resurgence and as vaccines became available and vaccination became prevalent, the focus of the SAB has also evolved. As of July 2021, 16 months after launching this volunteer effort, the SAB is still meeting, still undertaking reviews of articles, and still releasing information to front-line workers on the IARS COVID-19 website and in the e-newsletter.

This IARS COVID-19 initiative and the resulting website and e-newsletter are unique resources in that they draw content from all the available medical literature determined by the SAB to be relevant to front-line workers in the IARS community. Intensivists and anesthesiologists from around the world who treat COVID-19 patients have expressed great interest and appreciation. Feedback from providers has included comments such as the following:

- “This resource has really helped me stay abreast of our growing knowledge of this infection and disease.”
- “I pass key references on to colleagues or the Ministry of Health. Please continue it!”
- “The newsletter plays a very important role in sifting through numerous studies and condensing the material into something useful. This work is much appreciated for those of us without the time to do the research.”
- “I am thankful for the SAB’s work and dedication. The newsletter means a lot and has been a good friend through this year.”

The IARS has acknowledged the exceptional dedication and leadership of the COVID-19 SAB by offering each SAB member a lifetime membership to the Society. This membership will give them access to the IARS journals and opportunities to maintain their connection with colleagues around the world. This membership is but a mere token of our appreciation for the countless hours these valued colleagues have contributed to helping others during the pandemic. We are proud to have the members of the SAB as long-standing members of the IARS and supporters of the Society’s COVID-19 initiative.

For many anesthesiologists around the world, the battle against COVID-19 continues at a fever pitch, and the need for our “pandemic of positivity” remains high. The SAB remains committed to continuing its outstanding efforts. Thank you to the SAB and so many others who stepped up selflessly to help in this impactful and constructive way.

Listed below are the names and affiliations of the SAB members. The IARS community owes all of them a debt of gratitude.

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