

## **What Is AIMBE All About?**

*Appeared in the AIMBE News vol 2004(1) September 2004*

When we first set up AIMBE, we had a vague idea of bringing together all the professional and technical societies representing medical and biological engineering. What was needed was a unified voice representing the entire field; until that voice was heard, there were many voices, each assuming to represent all or part of the field. So, after a seemingly long and arduous process, AIMBE came into being.

Today that central core of AIMBE is represented by the Council of Societies (COS), which has been more or less successful in bringing together the major players in medical and biological engineering. It was through the COS and its interests that AIMBE took on various public policy issues of interest to the field. In concert with other allies, we had major successes in federal legislation dealing with biomaterials and the establishment of the National Institute for Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB). It took efforts by the combined membership of all the constituent societies of AIMBE to achieve those successes. So, if pressed to give the major function of AIMBE, most would say “public policy”, and they would be correct.

However, it doesn't stop there. So after it looked like AIMBE would be formed, it was suggested that there be a recognition function for AIMBE. There would be a College of Fellows, representing the most distinguished 5% of the field of medical and biological engineering. These Fellows could serve as a technical and professional oracle for the field. An AIMBE Fellow was distinguished by the fact that she or he was selected by the entire field, and not just one segment or another. Soon, it became apparent that there was also a need for a very distinguished award coming from the entire field. That led to the establishment of the Pierre Galletti Award, in honor of the distinguished recipients, and also memorializing our second AIMBE President. Hence, AIMBE has also assumed an important recognition function for the entire field of medical and biological engineering.

The Academic Council (AC) was the next to be suggested. There already was a Council of Chairs of ABET accredited undergraduate biomedical engineering programs. That group had been able to discuss issues of common concern and coordinate responses. Wouldn't it be useful if there could be a body within AIMBE that was representative of all the programs, accredited or not, undergraduate or graduate, in medical and biological engineering? Such a body could be used to share ideas, discuss common problems, and contribute to improvement of the effectiveness of medical and biological engineering academic issues. The AC publishes its annual job survey, has dealt with NSF funding of academic research, has caused *US News and World Report* to modify its rankings of biomedical engineering academic programs, has discussed curricular issues, and is looking into problems of entry into the US of foreign graduate students. The AC has been a very active organ of AIMBE that has expanded greatly the activities and functions of AIMBE.

The Industry Council (IC) was conceived as an organ to represent the common positions of the industrial segment of medical and biological engineering. In particular, the positions of the medical device industry have been made known. It was thought that the IC should not duplicate other representative industry organizations, but could be effective by representing industrial positions filtered through the non-self-serving perspective of the entire AIMBE organization. The health of industries in medical and biological engineering is important for us all, so the IC can be an essential part of AIMBE. Over the years, the IC has contributed to the biomaterials effort, to technology transfer, to FDA regulatory reform, and to refuting junk science in the courtroom.

Let us not forget the AIMBE Annual Event. Originally conceived as a forum that went beyond the technical meetings of AIMBE constituent societies, the Annual Event has become the premier venue for discussion of the interplay between technology and policy. Perspectives gained during the two days of the meeting are important for formation of appropriate legislation, management of research efforts, and appreciation of the effects of technology on our society.

AIMBE thus has a number of important functions that one could expect from an energetic organization that coordinates an entire field. It has accomplished a great deal, but the best is yet to come. There are a number of issues that are to come before the AIMBE Board that are bound to reinvigorate AIMBE and make it much more effective. This will take your support; please consider the AIMBE Capital Fund Campaign about which you can read elsewhere in this newsletter. Also, we need your energy and expertise; please volunteer them.

What is AIMBE all about? It is about issues that concern all of us, that together we can make a real difference.