



Connecticut Chapter of the American College of Cardiology

Brian Malm, MD, FACC, Governor
Simon Flynn, Executive Director

Joseph Gnanaraj, MD, FACC, Sec-Treasurer
Craig McPherson, MD, FACC Past-President

CCACC Newsletter – Vol. 23.1 – April 2023



Hello – Goodbye from the “Gov”:

Happy Spring! It’s a time of renewal, a time of reflection, a time of rebirth, a time of rededication, and a time of transition. As I finish my 3-year term as chapter Governor/President, it’s also a time to give thanks. So before I share all the great news of the day, I have some thanks to offer....

[Note: In the comments that follow, I mention the institutions where people serve, not in a spirit of competition, but simply to indicate the statewide diversity of participation from which CCACC has drawn great strength. Our chapter is well-respected by the national ACC and that is in great part due to the individuals cited below.]

Thank you to:

Brian Malm, MD, FACC, who has served as Co-Chair of our Education Committee, became our representative to the ACC Board of Governors on March 3rd and, at our upcoming Annual Meeting on April 26, will begin his term as Chapter President. Brian works at Yale & the West Haven VAMC and has done a terrific job co-directing the Education Committee. He is a bright, patient, efficient leader and I know he will do a superb job as State Governor/Chapter President.

Joseph Gnanaraj, MD, FACC, who practices at St. Mary’s Hospital in Waterbury and has served as our Treasurer for many years, and continues to do so.

Kristin Bott, DNP, for serving as Co-Chair of our Education Committee and being a tireless contributor to the activities and direction of the chapter.

Sara Tabtabai, MD, FACC, who works at St. Francis Hospital and took over from Brian this year as the coordinator of the Scientific Session at our annual meeting. Sara initiated a new, web-based method of processing and grading abstracts for this year’s session (a major upgrade!) and, going forward, will serve as Co-Chair of the Education Committee.

Elissa Altin, MD, FACC of Yale and **Stephanie Saucier, MD, FACC** of Hartford Hospital, who helped give birth to and have directed the immensely successful Women in Cardiology committee of our chapter.

Irma Fotjadhji, MD, FACC at Bridgeport Hospital and **David Hsi, MD, FACC**, at Stamford Hospital, who co-founded and directed the Cardio-Oncology activities of the chapter over the last 2 years.

To the 10 physicians who have served as **members of the governing Council** of the CCACC:

- Brian Malm, MD, Yale & West Haven VAMC
- Stephanie Saucier, MD, Hartford Hospital
- Eric Oligino, MD, Yale
- Paige Brennan, MD, Hartford HC, Mystic
- Elissa Altin, MD, Yale
- Sara Tabtabai, MD, St. Francis Hospital
- David Hsi, MD, Stamford Hospital

- Irma Fotjadhi, MD, Bridgeport Hospital
- Carol Y Gemayel-Barra, MD, Danbury Hospital
- Sean McMahon, MD, Hartford Hospital

And, our 2 ***Fellow-in-training representatives:***

- Erica Faircloth, MD, Hartford Hospital
- Polina Pinkhasova, MD, Danbury Hospital

And our 2 ***CV Team representatives:***

- Sandra Biolo, RN
- Kristin Bott, DNP

Simon Flynn, who has served as the Executive Director of our chapter since its inception (somewhere around the dawn of time). He consistently provides business acumen, organizational support, financial counsel and institutional memory.

And last, but perhaps most important, to ***Renee Rix***, our Administrative Assistant who keeps the whole organization organized and running smoothly.

Oh, and ***one more thing***: thank you to all who elected me to serve as Chapter Governor/President. It has been an amazingly interesting, satisfying and educational 3 years. I have learned an incredible amount about how the ACC works. It is a truly impressive organization. I have met many dedicated, smart people who go to work each day trying to improve cardiovascular health in our nation and assist all of us in so doing. I have learned how much advocacy on behalf of our patients may improve their lot much more than any of our individual care can do. Most importantly, I have met members of the cardiovascular community from around the state – many smart, hard-working, wonderful people who strive to make the lives of their patients better. It has been my vision for the Connecticut Chapter of the ACC to rekindle the sense of comradery and collegiality that we all sought when we went into medicine – a spirit of cooperation that may have been beaten down as we have been forced to work in ever-increasingly isolated silos of competing, large health care systems. The horrible ravages of the coronavirus pandemic forced our institutions to cooperate, to distribute patients throughout the state to lighten the load on the institutions that were most severely impacted. It was a shining moment in an otherwise dark time.

Working with the members of the CCACC has reaffirmed my vision. It has been my honor, my joy and delight working with all whom I have come to meet. This summer, I will be relocating to Massachusetts to live with my wife of one year and perhaps start a new career. There is a rumor that the Massachusetts ACC chapter may need some help, who knows....

Now, for the news....

At CCACC:

1. **CCACC Annual Meeting**: Our annual meeting will be held on Wednesday, **April 26, 2023** at **The Waterview**, in Monroe. Highlights will include:
 - a. An afternoon Scientific Session featuring presentation of abstracts by Cardiology Fellows and Medical Residents from around the state (69 were submitted, 20 were accepted for presentation) – registration begins at **2 PM**;
 - b. An evening cocktail reception (begins at **4:45 PM**) and dinner meeting that will feature:
 - i. Acknowledgement of our leadership transitions.
 - ii. Presentation of the Founders Award (see below).
 - iii. Keynote lecture by ***Joseph Marine, MD, FACC*** of Johns Hopkins who will discuss the evolving therapy of atrial fibrillation over the past 20 years – lots of new information on this topic!!
2. **WIC event**: On May 6, 2023, our Women in Cardiology Committee will present an educational event entitled, **“Cardiology for the Internist: What Every Provider Needs to Know”** from 7 AM until 12:30 PM at the **TPC River Highlands** club in Cromwell, CT (where the pros play golf). The event will feature a series of 12 brief reviews by Cardiology fellows from around the state that aim to inform Internal

Medicine Physicians about current practice standards for cardiovascular conditions. The keynote speaker will be **Dr. Colleen Harrington**, of MGH and current Governor of the Massachusetts Chapter of ACC, who will speak on “Women in Cardiology.” A total of 3.5 hours of CME will be available to physicians and nurses. Registration is available at: <https://hhchealth.cloud-cme.com/WomenInCardiology>.

Announcing The Lawrence Cohen Founder’s Award:

At the Annual Meeting on April 26th, we will present, for the 2nd time, our Founder’s Award in grateful recognition to a member of the Connecticut Cardiology Community who has made significant contribution to the CCACC. Named after one of the true founders of the Connecticut Chapter of the American College of Cardiology, **Dr. Lawrence S. Cohen**, of Yale University, this year the award will be bestowed upon the other true founder of CCACC, **Dr. Jonathan Alexander**, of Danbury Hospital. Dr. Alexander was the driving force and backbone of the chapter at its inception and, like Dr. Cohen, he has remained active in it ever since. Dr. Cohen will present the award to Dr. Alexander. Please come to the meeting to stand up and cheer for two of the true Cardiology giants of our state.

Congratulations to our CCACC national Jeopardy Team

On Saturday, March 4, 2023, at the Annual Meeting of The American College of Cardiology, our 4-person Connecticut Jeopardy team was to have competed in the annual fellows Jeopardy competition (recall that last year, our team finished in 2nd place in the national competition). Unfortunately, this year, due to a communications breakdown, our team was disqualified. Nonetheless, we congratulate and thank our 4-team members, who are listed below, and their team coach, **Evgeny Shkolnik, MD** (Bridgeport Hospital & Yale), who was a member of last year’s highly successful team and helped prepare this year’s team for the competition. This year’s team included the following fellows:

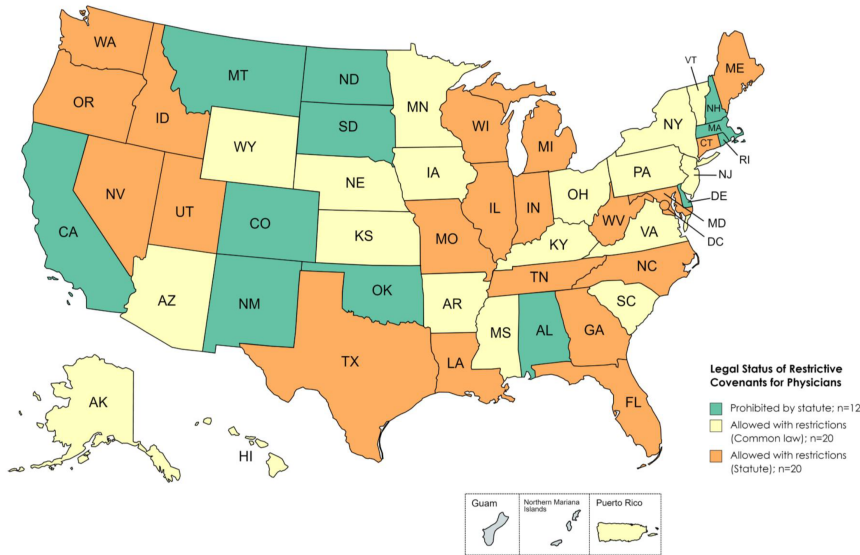
- Gini Jeyashanmugaraja, MD (Bridgeport Hospital)
- Manish Kumar, MD (UConn)
- Andrew Levin, MD (Yale)
- Ayesha Shaik, MD (Hartford Hospital)

Advocacy issues & opportunities from ACC – your chance to get involved:

There are several “hot button” healthcare issues percolating in and around Congress that highlight the immense advocacy role that ACC plays in encouraging Congress to pass beneficial healthcare legislation. They deserve your attention; many deserve your support. They are briefly described below.

Restrictive covenants: Also known as “geographical exclusion clauses” or “non-compete clauses” in employment contracts, these clauses forbid an individual from leaving one employer (e.g. hospital or healthcare system) and working at a competitor organization within a certain mile radius (e.g. 20 miles) for a specified period of time (e.g. 1 or 2 years). Below is a visual depiction of the state-by-state status of restrictive covenant laws as of July 2022 that I created (with editorial assistance of Dr. Joseph Marine, our keynote speaker on April 26th):

Restrictive Covenants for Physicians – State-by-State as of July 2022



Data collated by ACC BOG Task Force

Map by Craig McPherson, MD, FACC (using MapChart)

As noted on the map, such geographical exclusions are prohibited in 12 states (including MA & RI), allowed with some restrictions based on “common law” in 20, and permitted with some restrictions in 20 states (including CT). On January 19, 2023, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) proposed a ruling that bans such covenants. On April 3, 2023, the ACC sent a carefully nuanced commentary to the FTC on its proposed ruling. As background, endorsing the concern aroused by these employment clauses, the ACC cited the following amazing data: “... in 2008, 90% of cardiologists operated in a private practice setting while 10% were in an employed/integrated model. In the same survey ten years later, the results were nearly the inverse, with 84% of cardiologists employed and just 16% remaining in private practice settings.” Such contract clauses may have affected many of you. The ACC, in its 5-page commentary, generally endorsed the spirit of the proposed FTC ruling: “... the ACC generally supports the Commission’s proposal to eliminate non-compete clauses as an unfair method of competition...” The ACC emphasized that in the presence of ever-expanding large healthcare systems, geographical exclusion clauses that prohibit exiting physicians from working within a certain distance of ANY facility that is part of the system would drive many such doctors clear out of the state. This, stated the authors, is clearly unreasonable. The commentary went on to state that, “...the College believes narrow, reasonable exceptions to the rule may be considered.” The writers then elaborated 2 specific, narrowly defined situations in which some practice restriction might be reasonable. The first was that geographic restriction within a healthcare system is only reasonable within a small radius of the specific facility in which the affected physician primarily practiced, not ALL the facilities that belong to the system. The second was that prohibitively expensive financial penalties imposed upon exiting physicians are an unfair restriction of free trade, but certain fiscal penalties might be reasonable, such as asking exiting physicians to pay back some portion of their medical school debt that their employer had paid. This action represents a superb example of the benefits of ACC membership – the organization clearly goes to bat for its members. On April 17, 2023, on behalf of our chapter, I submitted the following commentary to the FTC:

*“I write on behalf of the 450 cardiologist members of the American College of Cardiology who practice in Connecticut to **endorse** the commentary to proposed FTC **Non-Compete Clause Rule; 88 Fed. Reg. 3482 (RIN: 3084-AB74, proposed on January 19, 2023)** that the American College of Cardiology (ACC) provided in their correspondence of April 3, 2023. Even in our small state, non-compete clauses have been highly disruptive to the lives of many of our state’s cardiologists and the patients they serve. The commentary provided by ACC is a carefully crafted, balanced analysis. It endorses the guardrails provided in the FTC proposed ruling while allowing that some, nuanced restrictions to non-compete clauses are reasonable. The governing council of the Connecticut Chapter of the ACC fully endorses the commentary provided by*

ACC and urges FTC to move forward with implementation of its ruling, with the modifications suggested by ACC.”

Public commentary on this proposed ruling closed on April 19. More information will follow.

H.R.2474 – Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act: Do you want to get involved? Here’s a great opportunity. Representative Raul Ruiz (D-CA) introduced this bill in the House of Representatives on 4/3/23. The proposed legislation seeks to improve Medicare funding for Medicare Advantage programs. It has only 3 co-sponsors (as of 4/17/23). In general, the more co-sponsors a bill has, the better are its chances of passage. The link below takes you to an ACC advocacy page that briefly (that’s less than half a page) describes the contents of the bill and provides a template by which you can quickly urge your congress person to co-sponsor the bill. In less than 5 minutes, your voice will have been heard in Washington (the more voices, the greater the likelihood that our representatives will act as we wish). So click here, experience the ACC in action and then tell all your Medicare patients that you are not only their cardiologist, you are their advocate in Congress! Here’s the link (before you click, read below):

<https://www.acc.org/tools-and-practice-support/advocacy-at-the-acc/features/advocacy-action-resources/campaigns?vvsrc=%2FCampaigns%2F103674%2FRespond> .

Note: The ACC template invites/urges you to add a personal statement that will be added to the body of the message that has been crafted by ACC. Although this is optional, it is encouraged that you add a personal thought – it tends to catch the attention of your representative. Here is what I added (feel free to copy or paraphrase): “The majority of my patients receive healthcare insurance through Medicare, many via Medicare Advantage plans. Unfortunately, reimbursement for healthcare delivery under these plans is woefully insufficient, which causes these people to be viewed as financially less desirable. Clearly, this may negatively impact their care and force them to seek different physicians who will "accept" their insurance. “

Also, I suggest that you start by entering your zip code where it is requested. This will automatically address your note to your representative. It will also take you to the correct note template (there is one thanking those who have co-sponsored the bill and one for those who have not – that’s the one you want since none of our CT representatives have yet signed on).

Now, didn’t that feel good! Thank you!

H.R. 6523 – Access to AEDs Act: This is a bipartisan bill that directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to award grants to elementary and secondary schools partnered with a nonprofit health care organization to develop and implement a comprehensive program to promote defibrillation access. Some of the things that these grants can be used for will include: 1) Purchase of AEDs and their necessary batteries and maintenance; 2) Provide CPR and AED training to students, staff, and related sports volunteers; 3) Develop Cardiac Emergency Response Plans for schools; and 4) Assist school athletic departments in developing heart screening programs for students.

This bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by Al Lawson (D, FL), and in the Senate by Senator Cory Booker, on 1/31/22. It gained new traction after the successful resuscitation of Damar Hamlin on 2/6/23.

Several years ago, through the efforts of many medical organizations, including the CCACC, the Connecticut legislature passed a bill “mandating” CPR training for high school students. Unfortunately, this became an “unfunded mandate” and the process of providing such training in high schools never materialized. It is

hoped that renewed support in Congress for this bill will finally provide some funding to support this important activity. Thus far, none of our congressional representatives have cosponsored this legislation. The CCACC will be reaching out to our state's representatives to support it. The CCACC can and should play a strong role in actualizing this legislation. Stay tuned!

In closing:

PLEASE COME TO OUR ANNUAL MEETING ON APRIL 26TH.

COME TO LEARN FROM OUR ABSTRACT PRESENTERS!

COME TO HEAR DR. MARINE'S TIMELY LECTURE – HE'S A GREAT LECTURER!

COME TO EAT & DRINK!

COME TO MEET YOUR COLLEAGUES AND OUR MANY SPONSORS!

COME TO HONOR DR. ALEXANDER!

(and come to say goodbye to me – I will miss working with everyone).

Register today at [CCACC.org](https://www.ccacc.org)

COVID 19 protocol: **None** (is that not wonderful!)

Warm regards,

~Craig