



**SOCIETY OF  
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# Health Highlights From the 2017 SOA Annual Meeting & Exhibit

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**B**oston, a city famous for its history, sports and culture, can graciously add another item to its list of boast-worthy achievements. Beantown has now played host to one of the largest gatherings of actuaries and affiliates in North America—ever! Well over 2,000 attended the 2017 Society of Actuaries (SOA) Annual Meeting & Exhibit from October 15 to 18 at the Hynes Convention Center in downtown Boston. The Health Section sponsored 26 presentations and sessions (a record!) that covered a broad spectrum of health-related topics, and the feedback on the collective quality of these sessions was overwhelmingly positive. (And yes, the summerlike weather in the middle of October played a major part in this.)

## DAY ONE

One of the highlights for the Health Section was its sponsorship of the Influence Training for Actuaries seminar at the very start of the meeting. An ambitious undertaking, this daylong seminar was led by the internationally sought-after leadership expert Andrew Sykes from Habits at Work. Traditional actuarial training has historically provided little support for actuaries to become master influencers. Kudos to Andrew for an engaging session, where attendees left with new skills on how to present more effectively and, most important, tell stories that will move people into action.

## DAY TWO

The official meeting kicked off on Monday with a presidential address from Jeremy Brown. This was followed by a thought-provoking keynote speech from Kenneth Cukier, a senior editor at *The Economist* and the best-selling coauthor of *Big Data*.

As is customary during the opening session, outstanding volunteers were also recognized, and the Health Section was once again proudly represented. Congratulations to Health Section members David Dillon, Gregory Fann and Maureen Premdas for being among the 11 recipients of the SOA Outstanding Volunteer Award.



Outstanding Volunteer Award winners being formally recognized in opening general session  
Photo by Hyon Smith.

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The Monday morning health sessions ranged in topics from becoming high-performance employers to the impact of medical expenses in retirement. The latter session was jointly sponsored by the Pension Section and included discussions on both U.S. and Canadian health care cost concerns for seniors. The afternoon sessions included applying behavioral economics theory to group benefits and a unique take on how potential changes to health care legislation under Trump could impact the industry.

The Monday night networking reception as always was popular among attendees. Coupling great food with many industry leaders, this was truly the perfect opportunity to make professional connections in a relaxed and inviting setting. And yes, the open bar was also a plus.

### DAY THREE

After an evening of pleasant socializing, waking up Tuesday morning was a challenge. This was especially so since additional time was needed to get to the meeting, as attendees stayed in multiple hotels in the environs of the convention center—some unfortunately farther away than others. However, the much-anticipated Health Section breakfast at 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday provided the right incentive. Moderated jointly by outgoing Health Section council chair Brian Pauley and incoming chair Sarah Osborne, the breakfast provided the opportunity to network with section leaders and learn more about the exciting initiatives in education and research planned for the upcoming year. Dr. David Cutler from Harvard University was the featured speaker at the breakfast. His presentation on health care reform was perfectly timed. In addition to touching on past administrations' takes on health care, he provided insight not just on medical spending growth but also on the "unnecessary" medical spending made in the industry as well as options for reducing costs in both public and private settings.

Following the Health Section breakfast, the sponsored Tuesday morning sessions focused on the cost ineffectiveness of several high-cost medical treatments, early warning signs of insurance company insolvencies and tips on how to deal with them, and how managed care organizations can use predictive models to better understand and identify risks in their population.



David Cutler delivers presentation at the Health Section breakfast Tuesday morning.



A peaceful transition of leadership: from Jerry Brown to Mike Lombardi.  
Photo by Hyon Smith.

The presidential leadership luncheon began with a passing of the gavel from Jeremy Brown to Mike Lombardi. Following the address by the presidents, the luncheon's keynote speaker, Scott Page, had the audience's attention. Scott is a professor at the University of Michigan, where he conducts research on how diversity improves performance and decision making. His

discussion on how we think in groups and the benefits of collective wisdom was much appreciated by all attendees.

Tuesday afternoon sessions covered topics related to misleading statistical techniques used by medical and pharmaceutical companies to sell the effectiveness of their products and how palliative care can improve the quality of life for patients with chronic illness, with a focus on developing a business case for covering these services.

#### DAY FOUR

Wednesday: the final day. Between 8:30 a.m. and 1:15 p.m., the Health Section sponsored seven sessions. These ranged from topics on managing the costs associated with end-of-life care to exploring recent developments in value-based contracting with pharmaceutical and device manufacturers. The consistently high quality of presentations made deciding which to attend very difficult.

To conclude, Boston—despite the accommodation inconveniences—was a perfect location for the 2017 Annual Meeting. The Health Section surely has a lot to be proud of coming out of the meeting, and congratulations to our new chair, Sarah, who was also the council's lead representative to the Annual Meeting, for her role in making this happen. Next up on our major meetings calendar is the Health Meeting, which is planned for June 25–27, 2018, in Austin, Texas. So please mark your calendar as we look to build on the successes achieved in 2017. ■



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