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Up Front with the SOA Staff Fellow

By Joe Wurzburger

One of the most enjoyable aspects of my job is the occasional opportunity to see a small idea turn into an amazing event; the proverbial spark that catches fire. One such opportunity presented itself last year.

As the 2015 Society of Actuaries (SOA) Health Meeting was being planned, an idea was pitched that health actuaries could use a forum in which to learn how to better construct and communicate their reports in a way that can truly get noticed. As this idea was fleshed out, it became apparent that this was more than just a 90-minute breakout session. There was a lot of opportunity to do something truly impactful. And thus the first-ever Best Actuarial Practices in Health Studies Seminar was born.

As the event was planned, many questions were asked, and the answers were exciting.

Wouldn't it be great to find someone who had previously been a "nobody" and presented their data in such a compelling way as to become a national sensation? This question led to Charles Gaba being a presenter. He took a simple idea—tracking enrollment in plans on the ACA exchange—and soon found himself being cited by everyone from CNN to the White House.

Data visualization is critical to getting noticed—shouldn't we try to get someone to talk about that? Next thing we knew, Eric Barrette from the Health Care Cost Institute (HCCI) was on the docket to talk about how to create successful reports that refine and summarize data in a way that is helpful to the general public without losing the most significant parts of the message. And a hot-shot Coursera data visualization maestro, Rahul Basole, splashed up stunning examples of what really drives a data point home.

Data science is all the rage—don't we need a data scientist, too? Why, yes, yes we do. Brandon Barber filled that role, as he was there to speak about data methods from the perspective of a data scientist.

This is all great ... but an actual hands-on case study would really help to tie it all together. It sure would. So the afternoon of the second day was an engaging and lively case study that participants worked on in groups.



The feedback from the event was stellar, and it was clear that people felt inspired.

Why am I sharing this with you now? I'm glad you asked.

The second-ever Best Actuarial Practices in Health Studies Seminar is going to take place this June in Philadelphia at the 2016 SOA Health Meeting. Believe it or not, early indications are that the content will be even better than last year. An impressive lineup of presenters is once again being planned, and the case study promises to be even more engaging than last year. Sessions from last year are being evaluated and, where appropriate, improved. For example, one of the sessions that was already a huge success last year is expanding to include the concept of how to incorporate humor into your business communications correctly. (Not that actuaries need any help with humor.)

If all of this wasn't enough, there will once again be a networking reception in the evening. If last year is any indication, there will be plenty of good conversation there (and opportunities to incorporate humor into your communications).

I, for one, will not miss this event. I hope to see you there with your best actuarial jokes in hand. ■



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