



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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SOA gets new executive director

by Linda Heacox

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Sarah J. Sanford, an executive with 20 years' experience in health care and association management, is the SOA's new executive director. She joined the Society in December after a five-month search by the SOA Board of Governors for an executive to replace John E. O'Connor, Jr., the SOA's executive director for the last 20 years, who died in June 1999.

Sanford comes to the SOA from the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN), where she was chief executive officer and executive director for 11 years. The AACN, headquartered in the Los Angeles area, is the largest specialty nursing organization in the world, with 70,000 members, 124 staff, and a \$19 million budget. By comparison, the SOA has 16,500 members, a \$20 million annual budget, and about 90 staff. Like the SOA, the AACN provides education and certification to members and emphasizes research activities.

Prior to joining the AACN, Sanford served in three administrative positions with Overlake Hospital Medical Center in Bellevue, Wash. Over nine years, she served as critical care coordinator, director of acute care nursing, and finally senior vice president of patient care services. She began her career as a critical care nurse, and she holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Washington.

Though her schedule has been packed since joining the SOA, she found time recently to sit down with *The Actuary* and talk about her new position and her background.

Q. Can you compare the membership and its expectations of the last organization you were with, the AACN, to those of the SOA?

A. My interest has always been in professional development — in helping members be successful in their

profession. This is a fundamental dimension of both organizations and a major factor in my initial interest in the Society position.

For AACN, the implosion of the health care industry over the last several years has been a significant challenge. In the 11 years I was there, the organization had to reinvent itself three times, and still we realized that because of the flux in the state of health care, we would need to almost constantly continue to do so.

Given that rapidly changing environment, I came to believe that after 10 years, new blood would be good for the organization. That belief was the real impetus to change for me.

I was interested in the Society because of its intrinsic relationship with the corporate world. I'm very excited to be working in that environment.

Q. What in your background best suits you for your new role as executive director of the SOA?

A. I bring a lot of passion to what I do. I won't accept a challenge I can't believe in. I come from a completely different background than members, but I have 20 years of experience in associations and administration, and I have had a chance to observe and direct successful models of operations.

Also, because I'm coming from outside the profession, I come with no particular vesting in the specifics of how actuarial science or this organization should proceed. When I was in graduate school, I had a professor who told me the more complex a problem is, the more important it is to have an outsider looking at the situation with you as you try to solve problems. You need someone to ask "Why?" and to assure plans are clear and



Sarah J. Sanford

logical. I think there's great value in that, and I hope to be able to provide such a perspective.

Q. Can you compare the role of research in your last organization to its role at the SOA?

A. There was probably a slightly greater emphasis on research at the AACN, but the issues involved were very different. In AACN, nurse researchers always had to fight for the credibility needed to attract research funds, and, of course, nursing research is largely clinical, patient-related. Thus, there are many safeguards for patients that add to the bureaucracy but that must be incorporated into individual study models.

Based upon my very preliminary exposure, it seems the research program at the Society targets more macro issues. But it is very encouraging that the SOA has such well-established credibility. I think there are a lot of opportunities for expanding our scope of influence relative to research.

Q. What do you see as the most important function of the executive director?

A. I see my role as twofold. First, it's

conceptual — to be a partner with the membership and its leaders to define the vision, the philosophy. Second, the executive director has to serve as the leader of the staff team and define and implement the activities to achieve the Society's vision.

Q. How many of the officers and SOA Board members have you met?

A. I've met all the officers and probably two-thirds of the SOA Board. They strike me as highly dedicated and motivated. It's exciting to see the commitment to excellence and the obvious focus on doing the right thing for the profession. I'm looking forward to developing a better understanding of the committees and chairs. The volunteerism in this organization is very impressive, though there is vulnerability in that as well. It is possible that chairs of committees and others who consider leadership roles will be unable to devote the present level of commitment of time and energy to those roles in the future. We on the staff team will have to closely monitor that issue.

Q. You are coming into the SOA at a time of great change in the education process. How is that a plus or minus for you?

A. As we speak, the new system for education and examination has only been in place for a few days, and I

don't really have a feel for the impact the changes will have. I do know that issues surrounding E&E are a big challenge for all associations. The traditional methods of education and examination have worked well for past generations, but this new generation, we are told by demographers and others, is very different in its expectations. They want to work hard and pursue objectives like education or professional accreditation, but they also want to do it on their own timeline and in their own way.

The risk is, of course, that if they don't find models they like with us they will potentially do things with other organizations and/or companies. The implication is that we will need to establish an interactive mindset; commit, if you will, to understanding what the up-and-coming actuarial scientists need and desire, and then determine how we might want to respond. We will need to look at how to do that — e.g., online education and exams, virtual campus, etc. Clearly, our challenge will be to research and then build our product with the users so that we produce what is best for the profession and the candidates.

Q. Why is it that so many people from the nursing profession seem to move

into very responsible, even top management, jobs? Is there something about nurses' training that makes them very capable as managers?

A. Nurses tend to become advocates for patients, and in these days of managed care, they have to. In certain nursing practice areas like emergency room, oncology, and critical care, for example, where the pace is very quick and the patients are very vulnerable, this is especially true.

When you do that, you see the obstacles to giving care very quickly. These might be payor issues, approval issues, or hospital bureaucracy issues. Many who leave nursing go into administration to impact some of these issues and make the system more patient-driven.

Q. How do you think you will like living in the Midwest as opposed to the West Coast?

A. People can't believe I left Southern California for the Chicago suburbs in the middle of winter, but so far, the weather in Chicago has been kind. I grew up in Seattle, where it's very wet, and that can make you feel cold. Also, many have told me L.A. traffic must be worse than the Chicago suburbs'. I'm sorry to say it's about the same.

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New forums, registration announced for SOA Web site

by Peggy Grillot
SOA Web Manager

Two changes were recently made to the SOA Web site's discussion forums (www.soa.org).

First, two new actuarial discussion forums are now available: Professional Issues and Student Issues. Conference areas include: the four practice areas — health and disability, life and annuities, finance and investments, and pension; general interest; international and SOA ambassador news; software and technology; Web site ideas and comments; and cyberchat — the lighter side.

Second, to post messages in any forum, members will have to register using their member ID and have their registration validated by SOA staff. The ID is alpha-numeric, with a maximum of seven letters, digits, spaces, and/or special characters. The ID appears in the upper right-hand corner of the 2000 SOA dues statement. It is also on most mailing labels from the SOA.

Members of other actuarial organizations and those interested in the actuarial profession are invited to register as

well. Visitors can read all messages when they log in using the "guest" button.

Additional features in the new forums include messages waiting, chat, paging, and e-mail notification.

As with anything on the Internet, the discussion forums will continue to evolve with feedback. The SOA Web Editorial Board welcomes comments or suggestions under the "Web Site Ideas and Comments" area.

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