



## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

# LOOKING INWARD AND MOVING FORWARD: RESULTS OF SGIM'S COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

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**A**s medical trainees and young professionals, we are taught the art of giving feedback. This delicate skill and instruction on how to offer feedback ranges from the "bologna sandwich" (positive—negative—positive) model of critique to one

where there's deep thought on how to help the learner seize opportunities for improvement. Last year, in the vein of seeking feedback on SGIM's internal and external strategic communications, membership messaging, and current slate of communication vehicles, Council convened an ad-hoc communications workgroup, led by Mark Schwartz and including Marshall Chin, Tom Gallagher, Karen Horowitz, Francine Jetton, Bill Moran, and Madeline Sterling. Knowing SGIM needed outside help to facilitate this communications audit, Council engaged Pyramid Communications, a strategic communications firm with experience working with mission-driven organizations, to examine our current brand, messages, and communication vehicles. More importantly, Pyramid also looked into underlying areas that bolster strategic communications, including SGIM's structure, processes, and staff capacity. We further asked Pyramid to provide strategic recommendations for improving our Society.

Professionals from Pyramid Communications reviewed SGIM's print and digital materials, conducted personal interviews with members, staff, and council, and reviewed results of two surveys: a member survey on communications and a staff capacity survey. Just before the annual meeting in April this year, we re-

ceived their very comprehensive and thoughtful audit and recommendations. We shared these findings with Council, and during the annual meeting also shared a synthesis of results with committee chairs and past presidents. Additionally, Tom Gallagher highlighted summary points from the report for members' consideration during his presidential address. Now that we have had the opportunity to discuss the report with Council, we wanted to make sure that the main results were also available to SGIM members. The audit highlighted strengths of our organization as well as opportunities for growth. Some of the key findings are as follows:

- **SGIM provides an important community to academic generalists. SGIM is a place that members go for connection, support, mentorship, and career opportunities. Pyramid described these attributes as a key asset and recommended we strongly promote the community aspect of SGIM. They further recommended we use these attributes as building blocks in our programs.**
- **SGIM has dedicated staff who are eager to do their best work. SGIM staff are talented professionals who direct the work of the committees, commissions, regions, events and publications; they are anxious to use more of their skills and experience to continue making SGIM the premier home for academic general internists. Our staff is one of our most valuable resources, and we can do more to integrate them as trusted partners in our work while supporting their professional development.**

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- **SGIM's current strategic priorities are not effectively providing direction, structure, and focus for the organization and its staff. We need a more effective strategic plan to help members and staff concentrate their efforts on activities with measurable objectives that will have greatest value for advancing SGIM's mission.**
- **SGIM'S current organizational structure, coupled with a vast amount of work for both members and staff, promotes silos and makes communications inefficient and are not as effective as they could be. The way we are currently organized splits communications, marketing, and membership functions, and further organizes work along specific channels like social media. We could communicate more effectively with a more specific strategic plan for promoting content integration across functions and channels, and for facilitating collaboration between members and staff.**
- **SGIM's communications are well written; however, they can be improved with strategic direction. Our communications need more substantial content that members want to see and engage with more deeply. Communications could be improved by having a goal-oriented strategic plan along with**

**a staff structure that promotes content integration focused on specific and measurable goals.**

Admittedly, feedback offered to help us improve can be difficult to hear, particularly when we're all working hard. Fortunately, Pyramid Communications offered specific areas in which to start:

- **Update and enhance SGIM's strategic plan with more specific business and programmatic goals and measurable objectives to drive organizational activities;**
- **Revise and refresh SGIM's mission, vision, and brand to communicate more effectively the organization's value to members and external audiences; and**
- **Realign the organizational structure to strengthen the ability of members and staff to collaborate and make best use of their respective talents.**

The communications audit recognized the incredibly strong foundation upon which SGIM can build to refine our priorities and sharpen our focus. We have many of the needed elements to put Pyramid's recommendations into action. Work has already begun in several areas: 1) We have a strategic planning process underway, that will culminate in the Council's June retreat. We will share the process and outcomes

of that retreat in future *Forum* columns; 2) We are working on refining our mission and vision statement as part of this strategic planning process; 3) We are explicitly ensuring engagement of staff in this strategic planning process so that they can be more effective partners in advancing the Society's mission and goals; and 4) We have a work group developing a financial sustainability plan for the organization. As that group convenes and makes their recommendations, we will share these with SGIM members. With these elements in place and the feedback we've received from the communications audit, we wholeheartedly agree with Pyramid's assertion that "SGIM has an important opportunity to become an organization that is the premier professional home of choice for the next generation of academic general internists".

We want to extend a personal heart-felt thanks to all staff and SGIM members who completed surveys, participated in interviews, answered questions, and supported Pyramid Communications in gaining access to needed information. Your contributions will help our organization plan for the future and become better at serving the needs of our members and providing a positive workplace for our staff. THANK YOU, and let's move forward together!

**SGIM**