Foreword

Beyond the Shore of Ignorance

Knowledge is “an island surrounded by a sea of ignorance. As our island of knowledge grows, so does the shore of our ignorance.”
— John Archibald Wheeler

It is ironic that the more we learn about a subject, the more questions arise. Clinical cardiac electrophysiology came into being in the 1960s as technologies became available to study arrhythmia mechanism in humans. The field exploded with worldwide interest in the 1970s. The established body of knowledge became large enough that, in 1992, the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) offered the first ever certification examination of “Added Qualification” within an established subspecialty (Cardiovascular Diseases) in Clinical Cardiac Electrophysiology. Today there are hundreds of ABIM board-certified electrophysiologists in the United States alone, and the Heart Rhythm Society has a worldwide membership of thousands. Clinical cardiac electrophysiology is now a well established subspecialty in the Western world and a rapidly growing field in the developing world.

Worldwide effort to understand and treat arrhythmias has indeed expanded the “island of knowledge” as well as the “shore of ignorance.” Through expansion of knowledge, our questions have become much more sophisticated. We remember in the mid-1980s, awaiting the results of the ongoing Cardiac Arrhythmia Suppression Trial to determine if suppression of PVCs after myocardial infarction would improve survival. The preliminary results were published in 1989 and completely changed our perception of antiarrhythmic drug therapy.1 Many paradigm-changing studies have followed.

Difficulties in clinical decisions arise beyond the interface between the known and the unknown. “What’s called a difficult decision is a difficult decision because either way you go there are penalties” (Elia Kazan; film and theatre director). In this issue of the Cardiac Electrophysiology Clinics, Drs Haigney and Strickberger have compiled some common difficulties that arise in contemporary clinical practice.

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clinical practice. They have asked well-respected experts to draw on their understanding of the “island of knowledge” and experience and swim out into the “sea of ignorance” to shed light on the subject and clinical decision-making under uncertainty. They have chosen to tackle a wide variety of clinical questions from catheter ablation to device management and limitations of risk stratification for sudden death.

We hope that the readers will enjoy reading these perspectives, which will help them look beyond the “shore of ignorance.”

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