

## **2023 ACR Wrap Up by Mitchell Lynn, MD**

The most memorable moment in the 2023 Annual ACR meeting occurred when a man wearing sunglasses climbed onto the main stage and discussed intimate details regarding his history of cancer. For those unfamiliar with Dr. William Flanary, better known by his online persona Dr. Glaucomflecken, this sequence of events may have been confusing or even uncomfortable. However, the keynote speaker quickly won over the crowd as he delivered a lively, heartwarming, and inspiring speech. The talk felt less like a lecture and more like a personal conversation. Dr. Flanary discussed some of the most vulnerable and Earth-shattering events in his life. During his medical training, and over the course of only a few years, he suffered testicular cancer, cancer recurrence, and then sudden cardiac arrest at the age of 34.

Dr. Flanary harnessed his passion for comedy to process these traumatic events and the hardships they caused. Specifically, he was frustrated by the unnecessary complexity of insurance and medical billing and used a series of hilarious videos on social media as an outlet for his frustrations. His content struck a nerve both within and without the medical community, and he has since garnered a dedicated fanbase. While the characters in his videos poke fun at many medical stereotypes, they also tackle serious issues in healthcare – everything from surprise billing and prior authorizations to private equity takeovers. Attendees were given a rare glimpse behind the curtain to hear the stories underlying his content firsthand.

Perhaps the most heartwarming glimpse came when Dr. Flanary revealed that the doctor who first told him he had cancer was a radiologist. Even though this was the most devastating news he had ever been given, Dr. Flanary recalled the encounter almost fondly. That physician was present in a way that comforted both him and his wife. This is an incredibly important lesson that radiologists sometimes forget. Our reports and our conversations with patients, though they may be brief, have the potential to mitigate or to magnify the burden patients bear during their hardest moments.

Dr. Flanary's online success highlights the importance of finding ways to cope with difficult situations, being open about our struggles, and how a community of impassioned voices can effect change on both an individual as well as national level. He detailed a particularly inspiring example regarding insurance companies. Dr. Flanary previously created a video parodying a policy of a large insurance company that posed a significant barrier to patients receiving necessary eye surgery. The overwhelming online response from his video led, at least in part, to this insurance giant changing its policy.

Most of us do not have millions of online followers or a talent for producing high-quality, entertaining social media content. Despite this, Dr. Flanary's talk was the perfect keynote lecture for the 2023 ACR annual meeting. He highlighted the value of recognizing the important issues and then speaking out however you can. Organized medicine is about coming together as a medical community and doing exactly that, and the annual ACR meeting equips its attendees to be as effective as possible.

How so? Well, the Annual ACR meeting is an excellent resource for policy education while simultaneously improving your toolbox for effecting change. For example, many have heard that "reimbursements" are on the decline but don't understand the root cause. Attendees at the RFS section enjoyed multiple lectures on how reimbursement works in the US, and all attendees benefitted from a robust discussion at the Economics forum. It's one thing to know that pay has

decreased, but learning about why empowers physicians to support and propose policies with targeted solutions.

Ultimately, the ACR's goal is to benefit radiologists, and this is not limited to policy. RFS sessions on leadership and negotiation helped aspiring advocates learn how to build a coalition and push for national change, but they also helped young radiologists looking to launch their career in the right direction. The meeting lectures on private equity in medicine educated members who draft relevant policies, but it also assisted others in making informed decisions about their own careers. The talks on AI highlighted legislative difficulties in regulating and reimbursing work utilizing AI, but they also helped demystify this emerging field for practicing docs. Numerous social events provided ample opportunity for professional networking, but they were also wonderful occasions to form and strengthen friendships. In short, the ACR meeting was a surprising combination of education, training, and fellowship. This may have been my first ACR meeting, but it is certainly not my last.