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Two Surgeons Honored for Decades of Exemplary Leadership

STS Distinguished Service Award recognizes those who advance the Society and specialty

SAN DIEGO (January 22, 2023) — Honoring their outstanding contributions to the field of cardiothoracic surgery, Stephen J. Lahey, MD, and Richard L. Prager, MD, were each presented with The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) 2023 Distinguished Service Award at the Society's 59th Annual Meeting.

"Every year, STS honors deserving surgeons for their exemplary service," said STS President John H. Calhoun, MD. "Drs. Lahey and Prager have both given of themselves over a lifetime to make our specialty and the Society better."

Stephen J. Lahey, MD Farmington, Connecticut

Dr. Lahey has made a tangible impact on the quality of life for patients and through his many and varied leadership roles with STS. Dr. Lahey joined the Society 31 years ago and has driven advances in care quality and patient safety throughout the specialty. He has been a longtime chair of the Workforce on Adult Cardiac and Vascular Surgery, chair of the Workforce on Health Policy, Reform and Advocacy, and vice chair of the Workforce on Coding and Reimbursement. His commitment to influencing better outcomes nationally also drove him to serve as a representative on the STS/American Association of Thoracic Surgery's Relative Value Update Committee of the American Medical Association.

Under Dr. Lahey's leadership, outcomes for heart surgery cases at several academic medical centers improved. Currently, he is the former Chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery and Vice Chair of the Department of Surgery at UConn Health, in Farmington, Connecticut, and stands as professor emeritus at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. Prior to these roles, he was Chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York, and the University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center in Worcester.

Dr. Lahey received his medical degree from Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, Massachusetts. After completing residencies at Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston, he went on to clinical fellowships at Weill Cornell Medicine and Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital in New York, New York, and a research fellowship at Brigham and Women's Hospital. Spanning his entire career, his research has undertaken issues in surgical quality and outcomes and, more recently, the effect of Medicare reimbursement on cardiothoracic care.

In addition to serving in national capacities, he is also former president of the New York Society of Thoracic Surgeons and has partnered with the New York State Department of Health Cardiac Advisory Committee, chairing the Quality Improvement Subcommittee and serving the executive committee.

“Dr. Lahey has been a tireless advocate for our specialty and society since his election to membership,” said Dr. Calhoon. “His work in Coding and Reimbursement has been outstanding and his service to the RUC similarly impressive.”

Richard L. Prager, MD
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Dr. Prager’s contributions to STS have been extensive and started when he took on leadership roles immediately after joining in 1998. He assumed responsibilities as chair of the Taskforce on Adult Cardiac Surgery Database, Taskforce on STS Database Audit, Taskforce on STS Quality Initiatives, and Council on Quality, Research, and Patient Safety. In 2017, he was President of the Society. Today, as a member of the Board of Directors, he chairs the Finance Committee.

Dr. Prager is a Founding Director of the Frankel Cardiovascular Center at the University of Michigan Medical Center, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he has also been instrumental in shaping tomorrow’s surgeons as program director of its thoracic surgery residency program. He served as division head and section head of adult cardiac surgery and is now the Richard and Norma Sarns Research Professor Emeritus of Cardiac Surgery.

Dr. Prager’s ongoing interests are focused on creating evidence-based platforms for continuous improvement in adult cardiac surgery. This interest and earlier roles at STS influenced his work to advance the STS National Database™, which has grown to be the largest database of its kind for reporting and analysis of cardiothoracic surgery outcomes. Similarly, he led the state of Michigan’s initiative in improving quality outcomes and data reporting for cardiac surgery.

His dedication has benefited other cardiothoracic organizations as well. Dr. Prager also is past president of the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association, received the American College of Cardiology’s Leadership Award, and was bestowed the American Heart Association’s esteemed Coeur D’Or Award in 2016.

Dr. Prager earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and his medical degree from State University of New York Downstate in Brooklyn. He attended the University of Michigan for general and thoracic surgery residencies, including a research year in the thoracic surgical laboratories. He began his professional career at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and returned to Michigan for the remainder of his highly productive years of practice.

“Dr. Prager has had an extensive impact in essentially every area and Council of the STS since joining our membership,” Dr. Calhoon said. “His work with ground breaking regional quality improvement in Michigan has been an example for all of our members”.

Established in 1969, the Distinguished Service Award recognizes individuals who have made significant and far-reaching contributions to STS and the specialty.

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For more information, contact Charlie Simpson, STS SVP of Marketing and Communications, at 312-202-5819 or csimpson@sts.org.

Founded in 1964, The Society of Thoracic Surgeons is a not-for-profit organization representing more than 7,100 cardiothoracic surgeons, researchers, and allied health care professionals worldwide who are dedicated to ensuring the best possible outcomes for surgeries of the heart, lung, and esophagus, as well as other surgical procedures within the chest. The Society's mission is to enhance the ability of cardiothoracic surgeons to provide the highest quality patient care through education, research, and advocacy.