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The Challenges of ACNP's Annual Meeting Locations

When I started with ACNP in 2005, our meeting nicely fit in the Caribe Hilton in San Juan, Puerto Rico and the Hilton Waikoloa Village on the Big Island in Hawaii. We had 750-850 attendees at that time. Fast forward 18 years, we are no longer a small, intimate meeting. Last year, attendance broke the 2,000 mark. With many Council initiatives to offer the opportunity to attend the meeting to trainees, women and under-represented populations, attendance has grown. I believe this has been good for our College as we continue to expand the best science in the field and offer education and career development to trainees which will grow and diversify the field. However, growth leads to changes in our Annual Meeting model. With a desire to get as many attendees in one hotel in a warm location in December, our options have become very limited, less than 8 properties! Add to that the desire to hold our meeting in locations that provide an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere that support our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and women's health... now we are down to 2 or 3 locations!

Council recognizes the need to take a close look at our meeting location, time of the year, size, and climate of the venue. An Annual Meeting Task Force has been constituted by Council to discuss these issues. Council recognizes the location of the Annual Meeting for 2023 is not supported by many. Council shares the concerns of many members and attendees that Florida laws do not currently support our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and women's health. Many have asked why we have not moved our meeting out of Florida. In short, finding a location for a meeting of over 2,000 attendees in the short-term is not possible. We book our Annual Meeting venues 5 to 6 years in advance. Additionally, we sign contracts with venues that

hold hefty cancellation fees (over \$1 million) to cancel meetings in the short-term. This length of time between booking and the meeting will continue to be challenging as laws and policies in cities and states will likely change over this period of time as they did in Florida.

Members often ask why are we not taking the meeting back to San Juan or to Hawaii or to a venue they have visited and enjoyed. I thought I would use the opportunity to explain our constraints.

1. Hawaii – There is no property other the convention center on the island of Oahu that can accommodate our sleeping room and meeting room needs. We did investigate taking the meeting back to the Big Island a few years ago. This involved building out a tented area for our poster sessions and limiting the number of concurrent sessions presented at the meeting. Council found this not to be a viable option as the cost of the poster area was more than the cost of my home!
2. San Juan – ACNP took the meeting back to San Juan in 2021, just after the pandemic. The convention center received great reviews, but the hotels received poor reviews. There are only about 600 rooms within walking distance to the convention center so other participants had to take shuttles which was not desirable. We looked at rebooking 2025 in San Juan, but several of the hotels could not offer us the number of rooms we needed and that would push attendees to hotels further away.
3. Los Angeles, San Diego, or Palm Springs, California – We have investigated both venues for our meeting. Just this year, we worked on a contract with the JW Marriott in downtown LA. While the venue was lovely, the cost of the sleeping rooms and food and beverage expense was prohibitive. San Diego is another option; however, costs are steep there too. The bigger challenge in San Diego is that they historically host another city-wide convention the first week of December, so we have not had the opportunity to secure adequate meeting space or sleeping rooms. Oh and Palm Springs....well, we were pretty crammed into that venue in 2017 and will no longer fit there either.
4. Some other location – I often get emails from members asking us to consider a venue. Usually that venue cannot accommodate our sleeping room and meeting room capacity. We need approximately 175,000 square feet in meeting space and there are very few hotels that have this capacity even in cold areas in December. Additionally, we need 1300 sleeping rooms per night for attendees. This is why we generally have to have overflow hotels for our meeting.

I hope this gives you a bit of insight into our struggles to find the right location for our meeting as we have grown. Council and the newly constituted task force will continue to work to develop policies and plans for the most appropriate locations. More to come soon!