

Q&A



Interview With David Thompson, PhD Outgoing Editor-in-Chief, *Value & Outcomes Spotlight*

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As a member of *Value & Outcomes Spotlight*'s Editorial Advisory Board, I've had the distinct pleasure of working with David Thompson, PhD (Syneos Health) for the past few years. As many of you know, Dave has served 3 consecutive terms as editor-in-chief of ISPOR's member publication, and his official tenure in this role will end in June 2020.

As section editor of *Spotlight*'s Q&A column, I wanted to take this opportunity to interview Dave about his journey in this role. In the interview on the following pages, we revisit stories of the publication's evolution and growth, examine some unanswered questions facing the health economics and outcomes research (HEOR) field, and solicit some advice for candidates who may want to take up this post for the next phase in *Value & Outcomes Spotlight*'s development—not only as a publication for ISPOR members, but for the broader HEOR community as well. >

Santos: As editor-in-chief, you have led the publication through its transition from a newsletter to a bimonthly HEOR news magazine. Can you describe how the publication has evolved over the years and how the magazine continues to serve the global audience of HEOR readers?

Thompson: Twelve years ago, when I first took over as editor-in-chief (originally as co-editor with Thomas Mittendorf) of what was then called *ISPOR Connections*, we immediately recognized that the publication was in the midst of an identity crisis, struggling to find its place alongside ISPOR's flagship peer-reviewed journal, *Value in Health*. Advice was coming from all directions on how best to fix it and there were strong suggestions to make it a peer-reviewed journal focused on health policy. We didn't think ISPOR needed a second peer-reviewed journal, but we knew it needed more than just a simple newsletter—so moving away from the look and feel of a “journal” to that of a “magazine” seemed to make sense. It took a while to get there, but *Value & Outcomes Spotlight* was launched about 6 years later in magazine format.

The second upfront challenge was improving the content quality. When we assessed the article backlog, it seemed to contain a lot of studies that likely had been submitted to and rejected by one or more peer-reviewed journals. So, we put in a lot of work to not only change the format and readability of contributed articles but also their quality. The final phase involved becoming more proactive and self-sufficient in terms of content generation. For the past few years, the *Spotlight* associate editors, editorial advisory board, and I have plotted out in advance the content themes for the 6 issues that comprise each volume. ISPOR has also provided resources to engage a professional writer to draft each issue's theme article, and we are able to solicit additional content externally consistent with the theme as part of the planning process. These changes have made *Spotlight* a more accessible vehicle for communicating HEOR news and information to a wider audience.

Santos: In your “Letter from the Editor” that opens every issue, you typically either stir up controversy or bring a

personal connection to the theme—or both. Which of the themes or letters have been the most memorable or impactful for you?

Thompson: The opening letter has evolved over time, particularly as the content of each issue of *Spotlight* has become more proactively organized around specific themes. Nowadays, I do my best to introduce the theme, provide my take on it, suggest why it matters to our Society and the readership, and then go on to highlight some of the specific content related to it. This has been the formula for the past year or two. Previously, it was like starting with a blank slate as there was no preplanned theme to focus on, so I would typically look to current events, mostly in the health sector, and provide a blog-style commentary on things. If I had to pick a favorite it would probably be the one I wrote following the death of one of my boyhood idols, Muhammad Ali, in which I highlighted his tremendous contributions as the “voice of the patient” in Parkinson's disease. It meant a lot to me that ISPOR CEO Nancy Berg sent a personal note saying how much she appreciated that one.

Santos: *Value & Outcomes Spotlight* recently won the 2019 APEX Award for Publication Excellence. What is the significance of the award to you, to the readers, and to ISPOR?

Thompson: This award was a huge surprise, as I didn't even know we were up for consideration. From my perspective, it's a nice pat on the back for all involved and validation of our vision for how *Spotlight* can best serve ISPOR and the broader HEOR community.

Santos: While providing the editorial direction for *Value & Outcomes Spotlight* for so many years, what developments or trends have had the most impact in the field of health economics and outcomes research? What are the top 3 challenges or unanswered questions that researchers need to address in the next 5 years?

Thompson: A couple things come to mind. Reflecting on recent history, I'm continually amused by the never-ending debate about the QALY [quality-adjusted

life-year]. The measure always seems to have more detractors than supporters, but somehow still manages to beat back all challengers. We've covered this debate and published articles on the impending demise of the QALY, but it's still here—you have to be impressed by its staying power!

Looking forward, I'm intrigued to see how a few ongoing trends play out in the coming years. First, the proliferation of real-world data sources, particularly electronic health records and connected devices, like smart phones and wearables. Second, computing advances for data storage, sharing, linkage, and analysis, especially artificial intelligence, which foreshadows the potential for humans to become bystanders in the process of compiling and analyzing health data. And third, the growing power of the patient—with the eventuality that patients will have control of their own health records and ability to grant access at the push of a button. Think about the possibilities. A payer's computer system independently identifies a problem in care delivery, decides to investigate further, triggers outreach to all relevant patients in the network, asks them to allow access to their historical health records and consent for prospective data collection, collects and analyzes the data, interprets the results, and implements a new care paradigm—all by itself. It's the stuff of science fiction!

Santos: How can ISPOR members contribute to *Value & Outcomes Spotlight*?

Thompson: The most obvious way is by submitting articles. We are constantly looking to receive high-quality articles written in an accessible manner consistent with how we've positioned the publication as a home for non-peer-reviewed contributions. It's also possible to become part of the editorial advisory board, as current board members typically cycle off after a 4-year term. As things open up, we put out a call for new EAB members in the ISPOR eBulletin—so look for that soon!

Santos: As your illustrious term as editor-in-chief comes to a close, what would you say you're most proud of or found most rewarding about this role?

And what would be the best piece of advice you would offer to the incoming editor who takes up this post?

Thompson: Overseeing the transformation of *ISPOR Connections* into *Value & Outcomes Spotlight* has been very rewarding. I remember having many conversations about the limitations of *Connections* with ISPOR's Founding Executive Director, Marilyn Dix Smith, and she was initially resistant to making a radical overhaul. I was bothered that the look and feel of *Connections* made it appear like *Value in Health's* underachieving little brother and I knew we would never get out of its shadow without taking things in a completely new direction. So, I kept developing these prototypes of magazine covers for *Connections* that made it look totally different from *Value in Health*. Finally, with the help of Sue Capon and others in ISPOR administration, we had a meeting with Marilyn and she agreed to the change. Once the decision was made, she looked at me and said, "Okay Dave, so what do you propose to call it?"

I wasn't ready for that one so I had to think fast. At the time, my professional title had "Value & Outcomes" in it. So, I said, "How about *Value & Outcomes Spotlight*?" She nodded, looked at everyone around the table, and said "I like it!" And that was that. This was near her retirement from ISPOR and she followed up with a nice phone call the next week confirming that the more she thought about it the more she liked the new direction we were taking things. So, looking back on where we started and how far we've come, it does feel good to have led the creation of a new publication for ISPOR, one that will outlast my tenure as editor.

Along those lines, my advice to the incoming editor-in-chief is to seek incremental improvements immediately, but don't be afraid to take the long view and put into place a plan for more radical improvements over time—even if it requires putting *Spotlight* to bed in favor of something that will better meet the future needs of our Society and the broader HEOR community.

Santos: Well, Dave, thanks for sharing your thoughts and stories.

Thompson: Thank you, Marisa. I also want to thank everyone who's helped out along the way—there are too many of you to mention by name! I'm looking forward to supporting the next editor-in-chief of *Value & Outcomes Spotlight*. •

VALUE & OUTCOMES SPOTLIGHT

A magazine for the global HEOR community.

CALL FOR CANDIDATES

ISPOR is seeking applicants for the Editor-in-Chief role for *Value & Outcomes Spotlight*. The successful candidate will work collaboratively with the Associate Editors, Editorial Advisory Board, and the ISPOR Editorial Office to oversee the editorial direction of the publication.

For more information, interested candidates are encouraged to visit www.ispor.org/valueoutcomesspotlighteditor and complete the online application.

