

Think First

Mark Proctor, MD, FAANS

I will get things done for America –
to make our people safer,
smarter, and healthier.

Faced with adversity,
I will persevere.

I will bring Americans together
to strengthen our communities.

I will carry this commitment
with me this year and beyond.

Faced with apathy,
I will take action.

I am an AmeriCorps member,
and I will get things done.

Faced with conflict,
I will seek common ground.

Why would I begin a discussion of ThinkFirst with the pledge for AmeriCorps? Because the message of service is one I feel we as neurosurgeons truly embrace. As young neurosurgeons, you are part of a highly regarded profession of hard working men and women who truly help society through years of dedication to excellence in academic advancement and patient care. In return for our efforts, we are generally well-reimbursed, but not always as well-regarded by society as we should be. From the outside, many think of neurosurgeons not as hard working and caring individuals who truly give back to society, but as smug physicians at the top of the salary food chain. Unlike the luster of the 'Greatest Generation' or the success of the hard working and modest 'Baby Boomers', we are often regarded as caught somewhere in the 'Me Generation'. By and large, this couldn't be further from the truth, and society really needs to see the great dedication and caring of the nation's, and world's, neurosurgeons.

ThinkFirst National Injury Prevention Foundation was founded in 1986 by America's neurosurgeons. Clark Watts, MD and E. Fletcher Eyster, MD, FAANS, in conjunction with the AANS and CNS, felt that it was the responsibility of neurosurgeons to try and prevent the disease that we knew best – brain and spinal cord injury. ThinkFirst has grown to become one of the largest and best-respected injury prevention programs worldwide, with over 140 chapters in the US, and additional chapters in 17 other countries. The efficacy-proven curriculum is taught to over one million children annually in the US, and it is impossible to know how many thousands of injuries have been prevented over the past 25 years thanks to organized neurosurgery. Should we be proud of ThinkFirst? You bet!

Over the years, ThinkFirst has enjoyed the participation of many of the great neurosurgeons in our country, who have been active participants and contributors to the program. This year, ThinkFirst was the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award from the CNS, the highest honor bestowed by the Congress for service to neurosurgery. Unfortunately, many younger neurosurgeons, the next generation of neurosurgical leaders, are not aware of ThinkFirst and its great tradition in neurosurgery. This has to change, and this is a great chance for you to serve neurosurgery, society, and your local community.

ThinkFirst chapters are independent chapters under the auspices of the national Foundation. They are organized by local neurosurgeons in conjunction with a Chapter director, generally a nurse or educator with an interest in injury prevention. The chapter director then offers education to schools in the local community using the highly regarded ThinkFirst curriculum, in conjunction with VIP's , or Voices of Injury Prevention. These are individuals who are victims of brain or spinal cord injury, and who discuss with students how education and better judgment could have changed their lives. These presentations are incredibly moving and effective for the kids. The return on investment is invaluable. It is obviously impossible to measure the positive impact you have when you prevent even a single brain or spinal cord injury, and being involved with ThinkFirst is deeply rewarding. Moreover, this is a two-way street. In addition to giving to the community, you are quickly regarded by the community and your peers as a physician who cares deeply for the local community. You cannot pay for that kind of advertising, and the time commitment of the sponsoring physician is minimal.

How can you be a part of ThinkFirst?

- Become involved in your local ThinkFirst chapter, or start a new chapter if there are none in your region. Did you know that most hospitals have a mandate for community service and injury prevention, so the dollars may already be there?
- Become involved with the national ThinkFirst foundation and board of directors. We are always looking for young and energetic members who can contribute to the organization.
- DONATE! ThinkFirst is a philanthropic organization that relies on donations from America's neurosurgeons. We cannot exist without you. All donations are fully tax-deductible.

To learn more, please check out the website at <http://thinkfirst.org>, or email me personally with any questions at mark.proctor@childrens.harvard.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

Note: Dr. Proctor is a Pediatric Neurosurgeon at Children's Hospital Boston and is the Chairman of the Board of the ThinkFirst Injury Prevention Foundation.

