Masters comprise a small group of highly distinguished physicians, selected from among Fellows, who have achieved recognition in medicine by exhibiting preeminence in practice or medical research, holding positions of high honor, or making significant contributions to medical science or the art of medicine. Masters must be highly accomplished individuals. Evidence of their achievements can come from many types of endeavors, such as research, education, health care initiatives, volunteerism, and administrative positions. The Master must be distinguished by the excellence and significance of his or her contributions to the field of medicine.

Dr. Joseph Alpert, MD, MACP

Joseph S. Alpert, MD, MACP is Professor of Medicine in the Department of Medicine and Director of Coronary Care at the University of Arizona College of Medicine at Tucson. Dr. Alpert is board certified in internal medicine and cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Alpert has served as Staff Cardiologist and Director of the Coronary Care Unit at Naval Medical Center San Diego, Director of the Samuel A. Levine Cardiac Unit at Brigham Hospital and Director of the Division of Cardiovascular Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. From 1992-2005 he served as Chief of Medicine at the University of Arizona College of Medicine. Dr. Alpert has authored 48 books and monographs and more than 600 publications, including original articles, book chapters, reviews, and editorials. He is the current editor-in-chief of the American Journal of Medicine.

AZ-ACP: How long have you been a member of the American College of Physicians?

Joseph Alpert, MD: I’ve been a member since 1977.

AZ-ACP: Why did you originally decide to join the ACP and why have you remained a member throughout the years?

J.A.: While I was still in training, one of my mentors, Lewis Dexter, told me that there were two organizations that I needed to join: the American Heart Association and the American College of Physicians. The American College of Physicians is a great organization; membership serves as a
way of saying that you are a member of an excellent group of internists throughout the country. I’ve attended both the local and national meetings throughout the years and they have been outstanding. I would encourage any young member to get involved.

AZ-ACP: What are some of your proudest academic or professional achievements?

J.A.: Well, in 2004 I received the Gifted Teacher Award from the American College of Cardiology. That certainly was a high point. Additionally, my 14 years as Chief of Medicine here at the UofA College of Medicine was very rewarding. That was a really challenging time for the college and medicine, and I feel like we did some really great work during my time there. Finally, being named editor-in-chief at the American Journal of Medicine has been a great honor.

AZ-ACP: Tell me more about your post as editor-in-chief of the journal.

J.A.: My mother was a journalist, so I’ve been taught the importance of being able to write and – more generally – to communicate clearly from a very early age. I’ve always done a lot of writing, and I think that it’s very important. Earlier on in my career, I was on the editorial board of a number of smaller journals, and I enjoyed that quite a bit. When the position at the American Journal of Medicine opened up, I thought to myself that I should shoot for this position. It really is quite rewarding to work on the journal. I write quite a bit – almost every month – and I am always very excited to see the submissions that come in for every issue. It really is very rewarding.

AZ-ACP: How do you maintain a healthy balance between work and the rest of your life?

J.A.: Well, I’ve been blessed with a great amount of energy; that certainly helps. Beyond working hard and keeping organized, having a good mentor is key. It doesn’t matter whether you are in a large or small practice setting. It’s very important to have someone who can help guide you and help you along throughout your career. They can also put you up for fellowship in organizations such as the ACP.

AZ-ACP: What are some of the challenges that you think the current health care system is facing, on the state or local level?

J.A.: I think it’s become quite clear that we need health insurance for everyone in the country. So many medical disasters occur because people delay in getting health care for themselves. We also need to do it as cost effectively as possible, however. The ACP has been a great advocate for legislation that would provide health care for everyone in a cost-effective manner.

It’s important to realize that legislation can change. Medicare in 2011 is vastly different than it was at the time of its introduction. Is the current legislation perfect? No. However, I think it’s important to be able to get something passed and continue to tweak it until it’s perfect.

AZ-ACP: Dr. Alpert, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us.

J.A.: My pleasure.