

# THE FAHE JOURNEY

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By John Scherberger, BS, FAHE, CHESP, REH

## A Journey, Not a Destination

I have worked for and been awarded the distinguished title of Fellow of the AHE (FAHE). The plaque states that I have "...successfully fulfilled the requirements for the Actions for Professional Excellence program and [am] hereby privileged to be a Fellow of the Association for the Healthcare Environment of the American Hospital Association." This is a true honor and, for me, a great responsibility.

"Job well done." "Pat yourself on the back." "You've arrived at the pinnacle of your career." Absolutely, I can't go any higher, I've arrived. Right!

With well-intended accolades such as those and if I start believing such bravado, I won't be at the pinnacle for long; I'll be falling off into the void of self-aggrandizement and insignificance and irrelevance. Because a professional never truly arrives and must never take oneself too seriously or one will begin to believe the praises and delude oneself.

Environmental services is a profession in which one never knows everything because technology, infection prevention, processes, and research are always advancing. Just as physicians continue to "practice" medicine and attorneys continue to "practice" law, environmental services professionals must continue to "practice" their profession.

# “An AHE Fellow is going to be involved, a leader, a communicator, one who can collaborate successfully with a wide variety of professionals, one who is an asset in more than one area of the healthcare environment, and one who thinks outside of his or her own box and boundaries.”

They, I, must continue on the journey of education, discovery, research, teaching, training sharing, helping and service. It is my belief that being a Fellow of the AHE is another step in my life-long journey of being a servant.

## So What Is a “Fellow”?

There are so many synonyms for the word “fellow” that it would be difficult to pin a precise definition to the word as used by the AHA and the AHE. For our purpose, a Fellow is a person who has the actions for professional excellence. So, what are those actions? First of all, the requirements are precise and exacting:

- The applicant must be a member of AHE in good standing and hold a CHESP.
- The applicant must maintain five years of continuous membership.
- There must be no lapse in CHESP for the past two years.
- The applicant must present proof of publication of articles.
- The applicant must provide proof of participation in national and local AHE or other applicable professional activities participation as faculty in AHE/AHA or other national and local seminars.
- They must pass a series of examinations.
- There must be a nomination by two existing fellows who know the applicant professionally.

- There must be evidence of continued formal training, post-qualification.
- There must be evidence of substantial achievement in the subject area.
- The applicant must submit a research-based thesis, which will be examined.  
So there you have it. Not impossible, but not easy either.

## Why Did I Apply to Be a Fellow of the AHE?

Quite simply, because I value the AHE and all that it has accomplished for its members, the AHA, the environmental services profession, the healthcare patients they affect and what it has meant to me. I look upon the Fellow designation as another way to give back to an organization that has helped me to become a better person, a better professional, and a person who is not afraid to expand my comfort boundaries. I believe that by becoming a Fellow, I can better myself, better help those I serve, better the AHE, and have a positive impact on every opportunity I take in my chosen career and endeavors I take upon myself and for others.

I found that the designation, and for me profession of a Certified Healthcare Environmental Services Professional (CHESP), has been a great asset in successfully conducting my responsibilities and duties of the current Board President of the Healthcare Laundry Accreditation Council (HLAC). So if the CHESP requirements have been helpful, surely the FAHE study and designation will help me in helping others. And in a way it has. Reaching for and applying for FAHE recognition has spoken to me in a very simple way: My boundaries are of my own making. I can put them up, I can take them down—it’s my choice. Everyone can do the same. I can only advise that we not let others limit us.

Many years ago, the AHA and the AHE decided that a professional designation was in order to recognize those in the healthcare environmental services arena. Thus, the CHESP was established. A few years ago, questions were asked by CHESP recipients: “Is this the highest goal we can attain? Is this all

there is?” This was in no way to denigrate the CHESP designation. Environmental services professionals recognized that there is much more to learn, to do, to address, to research in their profession. They realized that they can never stop striving to further their professional credentials; not for themselves, but for those they serve. If we don’t better ourselves, how can we better serve those who trust us to care for them?

Believe me, when a person enters a hospital and becomes a “patient” (in Latin, the word is *pati*, to suffer or one who suffers) she or he is often put into a position of helplessness, dread, despair, brokenness and hopelessness. If an environmental services professional is truly doing her or his job and training her or his staff properly (cleaning and disinfecting notwithstanding), the patients find themselves in an environment of hope, courage, interest, wholeness, and hopefulness. That is one aspect of professional excellence the AHE is striving for. It is what I believe a FAHE is supposed to be striving for: patient empowerment and quality patient outcomes.

## Isn’t the FAHE Just Environmental Services?

The simple answer is: “Yes.” A review of the requirement is clearly on healthcare environmental services. But, and this is, to me, a big one: Part of the scoring rubric includes active involvement in healthcare committees, joint activity with another hospital or healthcare organization, and activities and community involvement activities. In other words, a well-rounded involvement and knowledge of the healthcare “environment” and the community in which one serves. An AHE Fellow is going to be involved, a leader, a communicator, one who can collaborate successfully with a wide variety of professionals, one who is an asset in more than one area of the healthcare environment, and one who thinks outside of his or her own box and boundaries.

My career in environmental services has taken me on many journeys and many discoveries, and I’m not talking of traveling. I have



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learned who I am, what makes others so special in their life and chosen profession. I have had the opportunity to sit and listen to patients and their loved ones. I've also had opportunities to listen and really get to know what is important in the lives of staff and peers. Why did I want to work toward being a Fellow of the AHE? Because I want to help others. I want to help environmental services professionals get their mindset into the C-suite and boardroom. I want to help others see that being an environmental services professional is a noble and honorable profession that should be aspired to and grabbed hold of with pride, determination, and honor.

The AHE has worked some miracles in the last 25+ years of its existence, and the establishment of the Fellow program is another miracle in itself. I wanted to grab hold of that miracle and be a part of it. I want to continue to contribute to the success of the AHE and help enable everyone who has the desire and ability to succeed and empower and train another generation of professionals in the healthcare environment. The AHA has supported this opportunity, and I wanted to support it, too. I wanted to be part of something bigger than myself. And I am.

*"Do not become weary in serving, for at the proper time you will reap a harvest if you do not give up."*



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<sup>\*</sup> Dr. William Rutala, PhD, MS, MPH, CIC, "Endoscopes and the Environment are Ripe for Improvements in Reducing Infections." *APIC Daily News Monday* (13 June 2016): 1;6.