

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Following my introductory remarks in the previous Newsletter, when I gave a brief overview of the activities of the Academy worldwide, I wish to confine my comments in this issue to one theme, namely the two anniversaries of note to all Americans, which are about to take place. I refer to the 150th celebration of the ADA and by contrast, the 35th of the Academy. Each will take place in Honolulu, by coincidence located in Hawaii, the newest of the states within the USA.

It is a most significant event for the American Dental Association to have reached 150 years in its service to the profession and to the community. In recent weeks, friends and acquaintances have asked me why my wife Pamela and I are travelling across the Pacific to Hawaii to attend a dental Meeting, when there are so many within the dental calendar which require less effort. Of course there are many answers which may be given to explain the attractions inherent in making the decision to travel to Honolulu, not the least being the venue, the scientific programme and the friendships to be renewed. However, on reflection I wasn't available to attend the 100th celebrations and I most certainly will not be on the planet to attend the 200th.

There are few non-government organisations (known in the "trade" as NGOs) in health, which have been in operation for as long as the ADA. Perhaps the only two known to me are the Swiss Red Cross and later the Federation Dentaire Internationale, both being well over 100 years old. There are bound to be others and as I write, I am reminded of the Goteborg Dental Society (Sweden) which in the early 1990s celebrated 100 years since its inception. As a profession which started as a small part of the medical profession, dentistry has developed its own unique niche within the health professions, although in general we tend to think of it as a recent specialty. Whereas a review of history through the ages indicates that dentistry was practised by the ancients in Egypt and South America, the practice of the "science and art" of modern dentistry (as we now know it) is relatively new. It is thus a reflection of the times when science began to over-ride art that organised dentistry in the form of Dental Associations and Societies came to the fore.

It is therefore with much pride that we are able to reflect upon the advances in dental science and through them techniques, which allow dentists to confront and overcome the day-to-day problems which we meet in practice. Much of the capacity to do so rests with the support given to dentists worldwide by their Dental Associations. In this respect we are unified in our gratitude to those antecedents in the profession, whose efforts to develop it in a measured and scientific manner, allow us to meet the daily challenges provided by our patients. It thus behoves us as ADA members (yes, even though I am an Australian, I have been graced with Honorary Membership of the ADA), to congratulate the American Dental Association for its leadership throughout the past 150 years.

Despite our relatively young age (35 years this year), the Academy has forged a strong bond of Fellowship amongst its members world-wide. Of course, this pales somewhat against the 150 years of the ADA, although if a parallel were to be drawn to the ADA in (say) 1894, when it had attained 35 years, perhaps we don't look quite so gauche. Since then, we have managed to establish "Sections" on all of the world's continents (20 in all) with many more countries representative of our list of Fellows. In stating this, it is as well to remember that Fellowship is not there merely for the asking, but it is granted only to those who have provided leadership as well as a number of other traits which may include education, humanitarianism, research, teaching and clinical excellence.

In the 35 years since its inception, the Academy has supported through its members and through the ADI Foundation, a number of educational and humanitarian aid programmes annually. It does so through the efforts of its Fellows and by running the ADI "machine" on a very lean fuel mixture. It also pays no heed to boundaries, be they political or religious, it only recognizes need. Through one of its Fellows (Dr Paul Kotala) it has even managed to build in Laos, a small cottage which contains a dental office for the treatment of native villagers. No other facility exists for miles around this clinic and it is able to be staffed by a permanent Laotian dentist all year around, for a cost of some USD 600.00 per annum. The clinic was built from a decayed two-room house with verandah, at a cost of some USD 8,000.00 and it bears a plaque inside the doorway (not safe outside!) to honour ADI for its presence. The stipend for the Laotian dentist comes from a donation made annually by Past-President Dr Terry Tanaka, presumably made by some of his colleagues however, I suspect otherwise as when questioned, his answers are vague in the extreme!

So it is with these words that I leave you, in the knowledge that when I next communicate with you, all of the events in Hawaii will be in the past tense, although I hope that I will meet with some of you there. If the latter becomes fact, I hope that I shall be able to obtain some feed-back as to whether my words to you carry any worthwhile information.

In closing, I note that my computer screen contains many words which are underlined in red. Having just completed a book which was published privately, I am very aware of the differences in spelling as used in American English as opposed to Australian English. I am ambivalent about this, although my nationalism tends to cause me to adhere to the English forms of spelling (as used within Australia).

Despite the above comment (who was the wit who said that England and America are two countries separated by a common language?), we are indeed fortunate that we share the same language, albeit with spelling differences and thus we should all be thankful that if these are our major problems we are blessed.

Until next time,

Reg Hession
PRESIDENT

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