The Academy of Dentistry International

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Abstract

The Academy of Dentistry International was founded to promote the art and science of dentistry, especially through research and continuing education. Its mission is international in the sense of promoting exchange and service. The organizational structure of ADI is discussed as well as its membership. A defining characteristic of the Academy is an array of programs around the world supported by the Academy of Dentistry International Foundation.

The Academy of Dentistry International (ADI) was founded in 1974 by its first president, Dr. Albert Wasserman of San Mateo, California, following which it became incorporated as a legal entity within that state. As a past president of both the American College of Dentists and of the Academy of General Dentistry, Dr. Wasserman recognized the need to extend the ideals of these two organizations, particularly that of continuing education, to dentists internationally. From this, the mission of the Academy grew, to encompass the ideals which are written within its bylaws and which embrace such issues as:

- Advancement of the science and art of dentistry
- Stimulation and encouragement of research
- Promotion of continuing education
- Stimulation, encouragement and promotion of service projects
- Promotion of the international exchange of information and culture
- Promotion of ethical relations between dentists
- Recognition of conspicuous service to dentistry

In addition to these ideals, the Academy confers Fellowships upon worthy individuals from within the dental world at large, who have contributed to the advancement of the profession in one or more ways through clinical practice, research, education, public service, journalism, and service to the profession.

Structure for International Activity

The activities of the Academy are directed by its Central Office (headed by the executive director), the president and officers of the Executive Committee, and by its governing body of the Academy, the International Board of Regents. The Regents, who with the members of the Executive Committee constitute the Board, are elected by Fellows resident within a number of defined geographic areas of the world (identified as Sections), which currently number 18 persons. In general, most of the Sections of the Academy represent more than one country. To ameliorate the language, cultural, and fiscal variations that arise from this, some of the Sections contain subgroups which are known as Chapters. It is through discussion within the Sections and Chapters that Fellows of the Academy may advance comment to their representatives and thus to the International Board. In effect, by this democratic process the International Board of Regents is able to address issues of global significance, while local matters which are of direct interest to Fellows fall within the province of the Sections and Chapters. All service performed by the Officers of the Academy is voluntary and without financial reward.

As the ADI evolved, it became obvious that the formalization of the funding and

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administration of volunteer programs, being only a part of the remit of the Academy, would be best served by the formation of a separate entity, and accordingly the ADI Foundation was formed. It operates in parallel with the ADI, but its responsibility is solely to review requests for funding and to provide grants for projects that meet its requirements, according to those funds which are available at that time. It is administered by an elected Board of Directors drawn from members of the Board of Regents and from senior members of the dental industry, with all administrative support being provided by the Central Office of the Academy. As with the ADI Board of Regents, all work carried out by its members is provided pro bono.

ADI does not have a restricted membership list, although the very process of peer review, which may lead to acceptance of prospective Fellows, tends to confine its numbers. At the time of this publication, the total number of Fellows of the Academy is approaching 3,000, and this figure has been fairly constant in recent time. However, following the opening of geographic borders throughout Europe at the end of the last century and despite the barriers of language and culture, there has been a surge of interest in the ADI by dentists who are resident within the three ADI Regions of Europe (Northern, Southern, and Eastern Sections), and accordingly the membership of the Academy is increasing.

Expressed in terms of percentage, the present number of Fellows resident in the USA compared with the rest of the world is 40% to 60%, which seems to validate the founder and inaugural President Albert Wasserman’s vision of reaching out to the dentists of the world. The global extension of the Academy and of its work provides a broad spread of interest for its Fellows, as well as the commensurate coverage of the salient points contained within its mission, as developed by its founders.

**Service Programs Supported by the ADI Foundation**

According to the ideals listed previously, the Academy has been able to participate formally in all of the principles enunciated therein, excepting for that of research. As an entity which lacks funding, as well as the “bricks and mortar” establishment which may provide the key to the successful pursuit of research, for the present ADI is only able to follow this path in a peripheral sense. Nevertheless, with the encouragement of ADI, many of its Fellows have provided aid in developing pathways for individuals to further the pursuit of research.

Continuing education programs are provided at Convocations of Fellows, which are held throughout the world under the auspices of the appropriate Regional authorities as well as through the Central Office. In addition, at such Convocations, specific Awards of the Academy may be conferred upon persons of distinction, as well as to honor others.
of significance through the conferral of Fellowship.

Since its inception, much of the drive of the Academy has focused upon the work of volunteers to provide service for disadvantaged groups throughout the world, and, because of obvious need, much of this has centered upon those who reside in nonindustrialized countries. A recent example of such work is that which has resulted from the support given by the Academy to the entity “Tooth Aid,” created by Fellow, Dr. Paul Kotala (Australia). Dr. Kotala and a team of volunteers make a minimum of three visits to Laos each year to provide diagnostic, clinical, and preventive dental services for the people who are resident in remote areas of the country. On Dr. Kotala’s early visits to Nambak Province and in addition to his field trips into remote rural regions, he saw a need for the establishment of a permanent dental facility adjacent to the Nambak Hospital. With the financial assistance of the Academy and much ingenuity on Dr. Kotala’s behalf, a permanent dental clinic has now been constructed and fitted out with equipment to provide treatment which is beyond that which may be performed in the field and this clinic bears the name of the Academy. Further, through the ongoing support of ADI Past President, Dr. Terry Tanaka (USA) and a group of his colleagues who wish to remain anonymous, a Laotian dentist has been funded to manage the clinic on a permanent basis, as well as to provide ongoing treatment for those in need, between the visits of Dr. Kotala and his team.

By contrast and as a paradox, it has been found that there are many disadvantaged groups who are resident within almost all countries in the world where advanced or developed economies prevail. These are people who may have “fallen through the cracks” of the social systems which prevail in their communities. For a number of years an ongoing project of the Union Gospel Mission in Seattle has been supported by the ADI Foundation, whereby dentures are provided for disadvantaged persons who are edentulous. The facial and functional transformation which is achieved for these people not only opens opportunities for them to reenter mainstream society but also helps them to regain the self-esteem which is necessary for them to obtain gainful employment.

Other projects which have received support from the ADI Foundation in recent times have been the Thousand Smiles Foundation in Mexico (cleft lips and palates), the support provided for library facilities in dental schools in Cambodia, Mongolia, and Vietnam, and in more recent times, following the disastrous earthquake in Haiti, the provision of financial assistance to the Haitian Dental Institute.

**INTERNATIONAL LEADERS IN THE PROFESSION**

Through its recognition of eminent dental persons throughout the world, the Academy is fortunate to count within its ranks many from the profession and related disciplines, such as the health sciences and the dental industry. It numbers among its members many who have been at the forefront of their national dental associations, leaders in dental teaching and research, and prominent clinicians who are regarded by their peers as having achieved locally and internationally at the highest levels. It is indeed an embarrassment to name only a few of these persons, particularly those who have undertaken leadership roles throughout the lifetime of the Academy, while omitting so many who are equally worthy of mention.

Despite this and for the sake of completeness, it may be appropriate to mention a few among many who, by