

New Directions in Prosthodontics

During the past several months, I have attended a number of conferences and meetings of interest to prosthodontists. One of them, the annual conference of the International Association for Dental Research (IADR), is the largest research-oriented meeting in dentistry. This year, the IADR convened in the beautiful French city of Nice under the presidency of Dr Per-Olof Glantz, a prosthodontist. The conference comprised several symposia and more than 3,000 oral and poster presentations. Of the 3,226 abstracts published in the meeting book, 240 were categorized as prosthodontics; other related subjects included dental materials (604), implants or implantology (186), TMJ and masticatory muscles (134), and occlusion (34) (some topics were listed under more than one category). It was of course impossible to attend all these presentations, but the abstracts demonstrated evidence of lively, vigorous research activity of interest to those in our specialty.

Other conferences usually concentrate on only one or a few selected topics. For example, the symposium held at the University of Toronto in April 1998 attempted to identify successful treatment outcome measures for implant-supported dental prostheses. The proceedings of this symposium, which included a consensus report and an article on determinants of correct clinical reporting, filled the previous issue of the *IJP* (September/October 1998). The extensive reviews of different aspects of implant therapy clearly showed the biologic and clinical success of treatment with osseointegrated implants, but they also offered evidence that the efficacy of implant therapy has been poorly documented according to strict scientific principles.

Reports of new methods and materials are, of course, exciting for all practitioners, and they always attract large audiences to dental meetings. A major portion of the recent conference of the

European Prosthodontic Association (EPA) in Turku, Finland, was devoted to the use of novel biomaterials in prosthodontics and implantology. One session featured lectures on fiber-reinforced plastics in dentistry, another on the use of bioactive materials such as bioglass combined with oral implants. Both new materials look very promising.

It is hardly surprising that many enthusiastic presentations of novel materials and methods lack proper evaluation from a scientific perspective. There are no long-term data available, and seldom are there adequate comparisons with current practice. However, it would be desirable for such presentations to acknowledge that current information is insufficient to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the new products or procedures.

Not only new products, but also many currently used procedures and concepts in prosthodontics are poorly documented. This year's meeting of the Scandinavian Society for Prosthetic Dentistry in Oslo, Norway, focused on "evidence-based prosthodontics." The principles of the Cochrane Collaboration for evidence-based medicine have been applied to dentistry¹ and were adopted in prosthodontics at this meeting. Invited speakers presented literature reviews on selected issues in prosthodontics based on these principles.

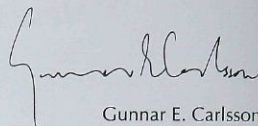
These reviews were at turns bewildering and worrisome. A MEDLINE search often provided more than 1,000 articles on a specific topic, but after those that failed to meet the top two criteria in the "quality hierarchy of scientific reporting" were excluded, only a few studies were left to assess. These two criteria (of a total of 5¹) were:

1. Strong evidence from at least one published systematic review of multiple, well-designed, randomized, controlled trials.
2. Strong evidence from at least one published, properly designed, randomized, controlled trial of appropriate size and in an appropriate clinical setting.

The findings of the reviews often conflicted with common belief. Many of our therapeutic concepts and preferences for materials and procedures, which serve as the basis for our clinical decision-making, are not evidence-based when evaluated according to these strict criteria. It is therefore not surprising to find so many conflicting opinions in our field. We must continue working to increase our knowledge, to verify common concepts that are poorly documented, to expose scientifically unsupported opinions, and to banish myths.

The many numbers of conferences and publications devoted to prosthodontics indicate an impressive volume of activity in our specialty, so there is hope that the changes needed to achieve the above-mentioned goal will occur even if it will take considerable time. The IJP will continue to report current and ongoing research. We will also continue to publish reviews to facilitate assessment of the profuse literature—there are currently about 500 journals related to dentistry!

As an addendum to these thoughts aroused by recent conferences, I would like to call attention to one of the many upcoming conferences. Since the IJP is the official journal of the International College of Prosthodontists (ICP), it is appropriate to remind readers of the next ICP meeting, which will take place in Stockholm, July 7–10, 1999. More information about this meeting is offered elsewhere in this issue as well as in forthcoming issues of the IJP.



Gunnar E. Carlsson
Editor-in-Chief

References

1. Richards D, Lawrence A. Evidence based dentistry. *Br Dent J* 1995;179:270-273.

Rowland Fereday Traveling Scholarship: £1000

The trustees of the European Prosthodontic Trust have established a traveling scholarship in memory of Dr Rowland Fereday, who was a trustee since the foundation of the Trust, as well as the founding honorary secretary of the European Prosthodontic Association (EPA) and its president in 1986.

The Rowland Fereday Traveling Scholarship will be awarded by the trustees to a member of the EPA, or a colleague sponsored by a member, for the purpose of undertaking collaborative research in another European country, or to present research to a European meeting. Applicants will normally be under 35 years of age and applications will be considered annually at the trustees' meeting held in conjunction with the annual conference of the EPA.

Applicants will need to have the support of the head of their institution to apply for the award and also the support of the institution to which they intend to travel. There is no application form, but applicants are advised to apply by letter to the honorary secretary, giving full details of the reasons for seeking the scholarship and enclosing the necessary supporting letters.

The award will be made annually, after the trustees' meeting to be held at the end of August. Applications should be received at the address below by the last day of June each year.

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