

How and Why Can I Sign Up?

I am a member/fellow of 11 different professional organizations. Right now, this being written near the first of November, I am in the midst of six meetings, all of which I attend and participate. These meetings are held on two different continents and in four different cities. Fortunately, three meetings are conducted in the same city and run successively.

You might ask why I do this. The answer to that question is pretty easy: I do it because I enjoy it; otherwise, I would not spend my time this way. The reasons for participation are twofold. A large part of it is payback to my profession for all the things it has provided me through my years in prosthodontics. Without this specialty, I would certainly not be writing this editorial, as I would be unlikely to have had the opportunity to be involved as I am. The other reason is that I simply enjoy being involved. Contributing to the future of dental care invigorates me.

This commitment grows out of my educational background, as I have always had strong, knowledgeable mentors. They have given me sage advice, and for that I am ever grateful. My prosthodontic program director, Dr Ron Desjardins, once said that you should only belong to those organizations to which you wish to contribute. The contributions that he was speaking of are generally in the form of sweat equity. This means that you work on committees and support the officers when called upon, and it may even mean that you sit on the board of directors and go through the officer ranks.

The contributions in terms of time, intellectual effort, and energy are repaid many times over by the feeling of accomplishment that occurs when you see the organizations move forward. No dental organizations are given the liberty to simply maintain the status quo. With the rapid advances in science and technology, dentistry finds itself as an evolving field that must also be consistently aware of the risks and benefits associated with the adoption of some of these "advancements."

It is incumbent upon all of us to become involved in organizations that help the profession succeed. Choosing organizations for participation then becomes a critical selection process. The days when a dentist could simply choose to join the national dental society that is appropriate for the region in which the clinician resides have long since passed. Indeed, there may be one national dental organization that every dentist living in that specific country should join, but that participation is likely brought about because of political necessity rather than scientific advancement. For example, in the United States, the American Dental Association is the primary liaison between the government and the profession of dentistry. The actions of this association have ramifications toward education, licensure, research, and practice guidelines. This association does not control all of these factors, but it certainly participates in such a way that the profession is seen through the eyes of society.

Beyond the national organization, however, there are generally smaller organizations that tackle specific

niches that are critical to the profession. Although the national organization may be the first that comes to mind, we all understand that it acts more like an industrial conglomerate than the individual components of that conglomerate. If we paraphrase an old metaphor, the national organization is the big pond of dentistry, while our smaller organizations are the little fish that make the pond vital.

With all these organizations to which we could contribute our energies, one must ponder how we should determine where our efforts are best suited. Obviously, there is no one method that is right for everyone. There are, however, a few things that likely could and should be considered when you seek to join a new dental organization.

In years gone by, organizations could simply exist with a professional perception of their activities. Today, an unscripted organization is unlikely to gain membership. Members today seem to gravitate toward organizations that have missions and visions that are compatible with the beliefs of their members. It certainly makes sense; why would anyone belong to an organization that was running opposite to that person's individual beliefs? With the advent of the Internet, it is fairly easy for us to scrutinize the mission (what defines an organization), vision (the preferred future for an organization), and strategic plans of most of the organizations to which we may choose to belong. By knowing these factors, it becomes much easier for the professional to contribute, because that knowledge ensures that the contributions will assist the organization in moving toward the general direction that is favored by the membership.

Perhaps the last thing that needs to be considered is the actions of the organization. An organization that puts forward a clear, concise, stimulating mission statement with a vision that ultimately benefits mankind but never actually delivers on either of these may be thought of as a beautiful piece of advertising for a product that fails to deliver on the promises. Instead, the actions of the organization should consistently reflect back upon its intentions.

Assimilating these comments, I would suggest that there are many areas within organized dentistry that can utilize your services. We all realize that the ultimate success of dentistry occurs when dental care is no longer needed because the diseases associated with dental care have been cured. Perhaps that is the vision that all organizations should elect to embrace, but that vision might be too far in the future. Instead, choose wisely with an eye on the future and how you wish to help chart it, and you will be rewarded greatly.



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