

A View From the Cliff

I am standing on a very high place. It is a strange place, strange to me at least, from which I can see a long way. And what I see looks new and very promising.

The American Alliance of TMD Organizations (the Alliance) is an affiliation of ten different national and state level societies with a major interest in addressing the problems of temporomandibular joint disorders (TMJD) and craniofacial pain. The Alliance is celebrating its 10th year since inception and has taken some important strides forward. The Alliance was originally founded to help deal with certain problems that often plague the diagnosis and treatment of TMJD, not so much from a clinical standpoint, but more so from a political, financial, and educational standpoint from "behind the scenes". To date, the organization represents over 13,000 members. There are various clinical philosophies in TMD and a number of the major ones are represented by the Alliance. Yet, on a more global scale, all the participating organizations still aim for the same goal, i.e., the triumph of scientific truth in TMJD diagnosis and treatment.

One of the major problems facing the profession of dentistry with respect to dealing with the TMD enigma has been lack of adequate funding for truly practical evidence-based clinical research on the subject. To that end, last summer eleven people representing the Alliance, at their own expense, met with congressional leaders in Washington, D.C. and visited the offices of 17 congressmen over a three-day period. Six congressmen promised to write to officials at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) to allocate more funding for clinically relevant research in TMD. Certain members of the Senate have also begun to *serve notice*. This all resulted in this year's appointment of Dr. Noshir Mehta, Director of the Craniofacial Pain Center at Tufts University, as the official liaison and representative from the Alliance to the NIDCR-chaired super group, the TMJ and Muscle Disorders Interagency Working Group (TMJDIWG), a gigantic government-based committee to which the Alliance has now been appointed an

official member. This mega-agency is composed of a number of groups which include 15 federal health care agencies, such as NIH, CDC, and the FDA to name a few, as well as organizations from academia, the private sector, and even the Department of Defense. The total health care research and development combined budget for all the members of this umbrella organization is over several billion dollars per year. And now here we are, the American Alliance of TMD Organizations right among them, a recognized official member! The government now knows who we are, where we live, what we have to say, and it appears they're ready and willing to listen.

Another goal of the Alliance was to get our foot in the door with the ADA (for all sorts of reasons both political and educational). To that end, more good work has been done by the leadership of the Alliance. This year Albert H. Guay, DMD, the chief Policy Advisor at the American Dental Association spoke at the Alliance meeting this past February 26, 2005 in Chicago concerning relations between the Alliance and the ADA. Now, the ADA also knows who we are and what we're about.

As to clearing some of the controversial air in TMD diagnosis and therapeutics, especially with respect to abuses executed by third party insurance carriers and the methods (and excuses) they use to deny or withhold claims payment, the Alliance is now working on an overview of TMJD diagnosis and treatment "guidelines" document spanning some 60 pages. Yes, they are proceeding on this document with cautious and carefully considered steps, but things quite often seem to start out that way in revolutions.

Ideas on a "state of the art" conference are also being discussed by certain Alliance members. Communication has already taken place on this with both the ADG and the ADA.

Three new societies have also made formal application to join the Alliance. Their membership applications were submitted and a representative of each organization made a presentation in person to the Alliance board at its last meeting. Though diverse in orientation, they

all have a vested interest in TMD and ardently seek membership.

So as can be seen, various steps are being taken, even if some of them are at first somewhat faltering and humble, such as those of yours truly to the position of chairman of this rapidly growing and maturing organization. That is why I can see from a very high place. It is because I stand on the massive and lofty shoulders of those fine gentlemen who have gone before me. Giants like Dr. Larry Tilley of Calhoun, Georgia, Dr. Barry Cooper of Lawrence, New York and of course, my immediate predecessor, Dr. Riley Lunn, Editor of *CRANIO*, of Chattanooga, Tennessee. These men are to be acknowledged and honored for their magnificent leadership and sacrifices in the formation and nurturing of the Alliance. And there will also be others who come after me. I have seen them too from this perch. They are, like those already mentioned above, men of vision, men of tenacity, men of courage and passionate intensity.

They struggle and work and effect the steps necessary, one by one, that forward the cause of the Alliance--a cause which at its core is to provide a positive force to aid in the triumph of the truth. What a grand experiment! How lucky we all are to have this chance and to have these men.

The Alliance is alive and well. It is growing steadily stronger in gradual yet persistent steps. It is an organization for the betterment of the patients, the betterment of the profession, and the betterment of the practitioner. It's an organization for you. How can the future, thanks to the groundwork laid down by such steadfast men as I have seen in this Alliance, be anything but bright. I am humbled to be with them and count them as brothers.

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