Commentary

President's Message: Pent-up feelings and new directions

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Suggested Citation

Barrett, R. H. (1977). President's Message: Pent-up feelings and new directions. *International Journal of Oral Myology*, 3(3), 4-5.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52010/ijom.1977.3.3.1>

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By conferring upon me the power of the Presidency, you have effectively stripped me of my greatest strength. For the past two years, I have been able to solve even the most complex of problems almost magically, by the incantation of three simple words, "Check with Marv." I think that in the future I will still want to check with Dr. Hanson in many situations; and I know that our Association will profit from that collaboration.

However, the past two years have also generated some emotional steam, and those of you who know me well realize that I can be rather heedlessly emotional. Installing me as President releases the valve, and I would like here and now to spew forth a few of my pent-up feelings. This will also serve to indicate some of the directions in which I hope we can move hereafter.

First of all, if our profession is to have authority, or command any respect from allied fields, we must grow. In some way we must find the means to broaden the base of our membership. Numbers count. Our small roster, select as it may be, is not expanding. We have rejected and dropped from the roll some 30 of our former members in the past year, for failure to complete certification. In turn, we have been rejected and dropped by 34 of our former members in this same year, for failure to provide a clear and compelling value. This is a loss of 64 members in this last year, more than our total strength only 4 years ago. At this moment, we could easily up-grade ourselves out of existence.

I am certainly not implying that we should lower our standards. The demand for **ethical proficiency** was present in the IAOM genes at conception, and I firmly believe that our type of certification will develop in our still-neonate Association into the rigid, supportive, yet supple backbone that prevents our profession from collapsing into spineless futility.

But ethical proficiency must permeate our actions after certification is achieved. We must not allow the conceit of a certificate to lead us into attempting procedures beyond our capabilities. We must not condone rash and extravagant claims beyond the scope of our actual competence. We must not, under the passport of personal certification, allow untrained, unqualified, and unsupervised employees to conduct therapy. Among those who were expelled from membership this year were a number who were well-trained, effective clinicians, who simply declined to take the trouble to prove their competency. We cannot afford hypocrisy.

Ethical proficiency should also be reflected in lesser ways, in the manner in which we speak and write and reveal ourselves to the public. For instance, I do not "give lessons." I provide therapy. Lessons may be secured from teachers of various types: educational, music, dancing. Even speech "lessons" should be sought from Dale Carnegie or an orator, not from a certified clinician. I think that we cheapen our profession when we offer "swallowing lessons," for our work should encompass so much more than that phrase implies.

I cannot end this list without descending to the level of my most constant irritant, the only thing that makes me feel actual shame for my colleagues. One of my primary goals during the next two years will be the **extinction** of the prefix "myo" in any free-standing use. I view this as a more "pernicious" habit than tongue thrusting. Those three letters, m-y-o, have no meaning in and of themselves, since they comprise the combining form of the word "muscle" and have import only if welded into the compound word which they delimit. It is not even sufficient to staple them on lightly with a hyphen; they must be locked without aperture to the stem of the word thus modified. We would not strip the "ab" from abnormal, the "pre" from premolar, or the "dys" from dysfunction, and expect to convey meaning. Since oral myofunction is such an integral aspect of our work, we might render it some respect. The prefix "myo" can also signify "mouse," "rat," or "rodent."

What I am suggesting, I suppose, is that we demonstrate a greater professional pride, in our work and in our Association. I hope that we can continue to increase our worth as an organization, to prove a tangible asset to our fellow professionals. This can be readily accomplished with no great investment; the cost is simply the augmented participation of individual members. At our present stage of development, you are each and individually precious. If each of you could contribute just a tad more personal involvement in the affairs of IAOM, the profits might be surprising.

Most of us, in our dealings with professional organizations, have grown accustomed to groups that have grown top-heavy, dictatorial, impersonal, with anonymous authority issuing decrees, and a large but indifferent paid staff to enforce regulations and to handle details with at least the aura of meticulous perfection. I hope that we never reach that level. Despite the fact that we still goof up a few certificates, and lose an occasional exam, part of your pride should stem from the fact that our frail, volunteer efforts have nonetheless managed to retain our independence. We have already turned back one or two efforts to "impose from above," rather than develop from our roots.

But this leaves us an organization of **people**, dependent upon our individual members. Each one selected or appointed to office is expected to spend a considerable amount of their personal time and funds for the interests of the Association. But they can only coordinate; they carry out desires and decisions determined by the general membership. With no input from members, they are impotent.

I have a few ideas and suggestions that I will propose. For example, with the approval of the Executive Committee, I have appointed a number of committees that we have not had previously, in hopes of gaining a variety of benefits in addition to providing vehicles for the involvement of more members. These committees should make it possible for us to keep our financial affairs in better order and to assure the wisest application of our limited means, to keep us current on research, to improve relations between the dental and therapeutic branches of our Association, and to assure that our future development is toward worthy goals. We will soon have a Newsletter through which we hope to open new lines of communication in many directions. I am hopeful that we can hold regional meetings between conventions, informal workshops where we can meet in small groups and discuss our problems and successes; I pledge to pay my own expenses to these, although I may need help from my wife.

Very seriously, however, I would like to request herewith that each member, as quickly as conveniently possible, write down and send to me at least one suggestion for the improvement of IAOM. This can be a pet peeve, a felt need, or a glaring deficiency each of us sees from a different perspective. These can be ideas pertaining to any aspect of our organizational being. They can be sent unsigned in a plain brown wrapper if you wish, but please give us the benefit of your thinking. I promise that your ideas will receive attention, and will be accorded a fair discussion later when contradictory thoughts must be resolved.

We have had a few cases where members have waited a full year before notifying us that they were not receiving the journal or other mailings from IAOM. In each case I have felt that the Association had been betrayed by the member: they had prevented us from doing the efficient, thorough job that we would so like to do. Not being professional clerks, but being instead busy, error-prone humans, with many things on our minds, we need help, guidance, and criticism.

So be at least as demanding of the organization as you would be of yourself. IAOM is you.

R. H. Barrett