

# ASSOCIATION

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The BDJ Upfront section includes editorials, letters, news, book reviews and interviews.

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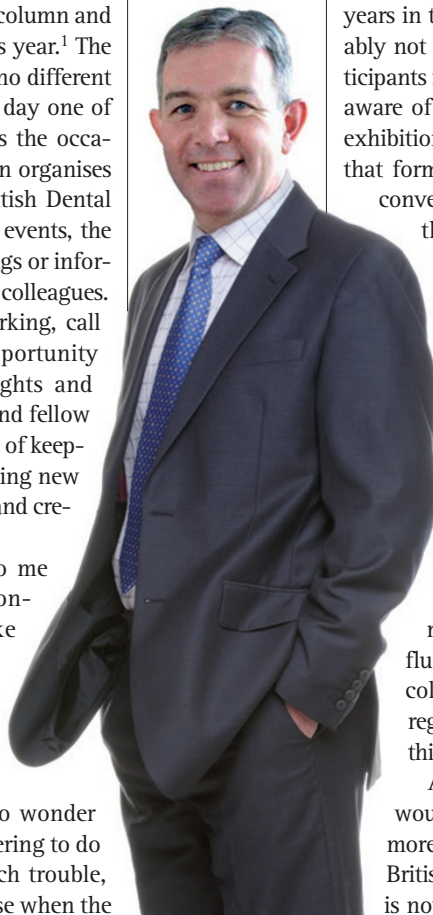
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I believe I am correct in writing that in prisons the time that inmates have to socialise outside the confines of their cells is referred to as 'association'. One of the first withdrawals of privileges is the withdrawal of the right to association. So that, even in the confines of a prison there is a recognition that the ability to meet others is a precious human need.

It is probably not coincidental that association is the third word in the name of our organisation, British Dental Association (BDA). One of the first instincts for people with a common interest is to form groups and to find a voice, a theme I have touched on more than once in this column and expanded upon earlier this year.<sup>1</sup> The founding of the BDA was no different in this respect and to this day one of the great benefits remains the occasions when the Association organises meetings, be they the British Dental Conference, the countless events, the branch and section meetings or informal get-togethers of a few colleagues. Discussion, gossip, networking, call it what you will the opportunity to share and trade thoughts and experiences with friends and fellow professionals is a vital part of keeping us sane and of promoting new ideas, imparting empathy and creating community.

It has long occurred to me that conferences and congresses are rather like Christmas, or other religious and annual events. They require so much thought, planning and organising that we often stop dead in our tracks to wonder why on earth we are bothering to do it all because it is so much trouble, and for what? Yet of course when the

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day, or days, come around and everyone has a wonderful time and extols the virtues of the season, the conviviality of the company and the sumptuousness of the food, and pass the remark that we really should do this sort of thing more often; then it all seems worthwhile and the warmth of the moment quite expunges the stress of the process required to achieve it.

London has recently had the pleasure and the honour of hosting the 8th International Orthodontic Conference (IOC). Not only an achievement in itself but also the capital is the only city to have been granted the IOC more than once. The organisers have been very clear, however, that it has been eight years in the making, a fact that probably not many of the 6,000 plus participants from over 120 countries were aware of as they visited the lectures, exhibition and the social programme that formed this latest of worldwide conventions to be held in the UK

this year. Earlier we were hosts to EuroPerio, ConsEuro and the International Association of Paediatric Dentistry, all of whom decided that Britain was THE place to attract delegates and provide the necessary infrastructure and expertise. Quite aside from the dentistry we should pause for a moment to reflect on the true achievement of this remarkable confluence of professional visitors, collectively numbering in the region of 20,000. That is something to be proud of.

And if that was all, that would be sufficient. But there is more. The IOC, organised by the British Orthodontic Society (BOS), is noteworthy in further respects.

To begin with the BOS is a relatively new organisation having been formed in 1995 by the coming together of no less than five factions and groups within the specialty. Significantly they agreed to bury their differences, combine their strengths and forge a single path ahead. Succinctly, they decided to speak with one voice. Significant because the strength of that unity has brought them the top prize in their field, the hosting of the premier five-year international event. There are others of us in dentistry (and I am not looking at anyone in particular but you know who you are) who could and should look and learn. Yet there are other benefits still. As the result of a personal initiative and friendship some twenty years ago, Trevor Hodge struck up a professional association with colleagues in a recently war-torn Cambodia. These years later the BOS has plunged over £50,000 of its own funds, derived partly through the proceeds of the IOC, into bursaries that brought 35 student or young orthodontists from developing countries to London to meet and associate, with their colleagues from around the world. I happen think that that is also worth some considerable congratulation and is something that other societies might emulate. Indeed the World Orthodontic Federation is now convening a committee to embellish and develop the initiative.

However much of a task it might be to organise an event, or however tedious it might be to make the effort to attend, the results can begin small but end monumentally. Association, it seems, has great benefits.

1. Hancocks S. Having a voice. *Br Dent J* 2015; **218**: 437.

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