

# Orthodontic Education Again

The American Association of Orthodontists in San Francisco adopted an amendment to its by-laws which in effect grants a monopoly to the orthodontic departments of North American universities. As the matter stands, after May 1957 only orthodontists who have had 1500 hours of formal instruction in approved dental schools will be eligible for membership in the organization.

The university departments may receive this news in either of two ways: they may take it as merely their due and settle into a smug complacency. On the other hand, they may recognize the responsibility which goes with the monopoly and find desirable a program of self-examination.

The writer recommends the latter course, basing the advice on attitudes appraised at the meeting. He went to the meeting committed to the support of the amendment, and exposed himself to a good deal of counter-argument by failing to keep his views secret.

Some of the arguments for the status quo consisted merely of nostalgia or of wishful thinking, but a vein of criticism of university teaching cropped out often enough that it could not be ignored. One man uttered as his considered opinion, "A course of a couple of years is simply not a complete education in orthodontics". The rejoinder, "Whoever said it was?" is an obvious one, and at first thought might seem to dispose of the matter.

But as the meeting wore on, it became evident that several of our younger members, university trained, labor under the delusion that a course of 1500 hours more or less *does* constitute a complete education in orthodontics. The significance of this lies not in the fact that a certain number of middle-aged men experience a rise in blood pressure occasioned by the patronizing

airs of younger men. Enough men in the middle reaches of life have fortified their valuable clinical experience with an understanding of growth and of cephalometrics, gained on their own initiative, to have found that the young sprouts do not know nearly as much about these subjects as some of them pretend. There is no real need to retire in abject confusion when these erudite matters are introduced into the conversation.

Our real concern is for the young men themselves. By making an interesting discovery through prolonged discussion, those of us at the University of California have one firm conviction concerning the merits of orthodontic education. For a number of years after World War II we conducted a sort of controlled experiment in orthodontic education, although that was not our immediate objective. We offered, as we have for more than two decades, the undergraduate orthodontic major and at the same time a conventional postgraduate program comparable with that offered in other institutions. They were approximately equal with respect to the number of contact hours, and entirely equal with respect to staff. Although considerations of space required us to abandon the postgraduate course after some six years, the relative merits of the two programs are still debated when members of the orthodontic staff gather informally. Human nature being what it is, the products of the undergraduate program were inclined to champion it as the better of the two, whereas the advocates of the postgraduate curriculum came from that more conventional plan of instruction.

The interesting discovery arose out of the fact that we were inclined to argue, as it were, *ad hominem*. A proponent of the undergraduate program

would cite as a shining example an outstanding product of that program, only to be countered by a similarly shining example in the postgraduate course. Names flew thick and fast in the heat of the argument, and inevitably certain names were cited as miserable examples (we have them too) of a particular kind of instruction.

As might be expected, the argument never got settled on this basis and remains unsettled today. It is a significant fact, however, that wherever a name was singled out for purposes of pointing to with pride, it was a person who had treated his formal education merely as a beginning point. The shining examples were those who promptly became associated with a study club, or became identified with a teaching institution, or regularly took courses of one kind or another. The individuals who were viewed with alarm were invariably those who holed themselves up in their own offices and had little or nothing to do with other orthodontists after they received their diplomas or certificates. This is hardly a new thought, for G. V. Black said many years ago that the professional man had the obligation to be a continuous student. It is nevertheless interesting that when lists of names were compiled for an altogether different purpose, they provided abundant testimony with respect to a continuing drive for self-improvement among those recognized as shining examples.

In its zeal for improving the course, the university department must avoid giving the impression to the students that so much improvement has been gained that all orthodontic knowledge has been encompassed; a university has an unexcelled opportunity to teach a man how he may become a continuous student and to provide him with a few of the techniques. It is unfair to generalize broadly about university graduates because a few of their num-

ber have formed early their habits of self-congratulation. Nevertheless, some orthodontists do just that; for their own protection university departments should stifle this burgeoning provincialism in its students before it gets a headlong start.

This, among other things, might be profitably discussed in a meeting of those responsible for university orthodontic education. Some of the other things are: the present status and future direction for orthodontic research as conducted by graduate students; the establishment of some sort of clearing-house whereby we might learn what research is being done in sister institutions. There may even be one or two who agree with the writer that orthodontics in the undergraduate curriculum might be dropped as a topic at the American Association of Dental Schools for at least one year, in order that we might discuss the educational background of the orthodontist—whether or not every one of us feels that this legislation virtually obligates us to do so.

WENDELL L. WYLIE

## The Angle Orthodontist

*A magazine established  
by the co-workers  
of Edward H. Angle,  
in his memory . . .*

**Co-editors:** Morse R. Newcomb and Arthur B. Lewis.

**Business Manager:** Silas J. Kloehn, Zuelke Building, Appleton, Wisconsin.

**Associate Editors:** Anna Hopkins Angle, Allan G. Brodie, Frederick B. Noyes, Harold J. Noyes, Robert H. W. Strang, Wendell L. Wylie.

Vol. 25, No. 3

July, 1955