

The Edward H. Angle Society of Orthodontists 2001

A North American or an International Society?

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In 1922, 46 graduates of Edward H. Angle's programs formed the Edward H. Angle Society of Orthodontia. When Angle died in 1930, the society ceased to exist. In 1930, 22 members of the former society reorganized into today's Edward H. Angle Society of Orthodontists. This society was composed of a central organization made up of four component societies: eastern, midwestern, northern California, and southern California. At later dates, the Northwest, the Southwest, and the North Atlantic Components were created from existing societies.¹

The Angle society presently has 562 members (approximately 5% of North American orthodontists). All members either reside in the designated US and Canadian geographic component areas or they are members at large. More than 8% of the members live in countries outside the United States. An original intent of assimilating overseas orthodontists into the Angle society was to show them how the organization functions so they could return home to organize their own units. This has not happened, and the present practice does not serve the best interest of overseas orthodontists.

What has happened is that a growing interest in orthodontics in Europe led to the organization of the Angle Society of Europe in 1974. This organization was modeled after, but completely independent of, the society in North America.

Now, as interest in orthodontics grows in Asia and other parts of the world, we are at an orthodontic Rubicon. If we follow past practices, a few overseas orthodontists will continue to be assimilated into existing North American components, whereas others will seek to form their own version of the Angle Society of Europe. Is this the best way to organize for maximum communication and information exchange for the ultimate good of orthodontic patients? This issue must not be decided by regional chauvinism or local pride.

Our Angle society functions as a weak central body with modest dues and one biennial meeting. Most of the action is at the local component level. The components vary in their practices, with each component having its own dues and meeting style. Central control is minimal. A more international Angle society could also conduct most functions at the local level while still fostering communication among all society members at periodic international meetings.

On the basis of the rationale that education and information are the coin of the realm, more effective information transfer is the goal. New information may seem threatening or difficult to deal with, but in the long run, the truth is always easier to handle than platitudes or guru orthodontics. It can be argued that Edward Angle was a guru, and there is an element of truth in that view. But that was another time and another point in

our development. "Show me how to work the appliance" was the operational phrase 40 years ago. Disciplines usually begin with preceptorlike on-the-job training. However, as a discipline grows and we learn more, an information base develops and education begins to evolve. We need factual information in order to have a firm foundation for future learning.

In orthodontics, we clearly stand on the shoulders of the giants who preceded us. It is very comfortable to discuss our problems only with people who have similar backgrounds and parallel experiences, but we will learn more talking with people who have different experiences and other perspectives. This is initially a less comfortable place to put yourself, but one much more likely to lead to professional growth.

Tentative moves toward closer ties between orthodontists with similar goals, irrespective of geography, have occurred in recent years. This is clearly parallel to the wave of globalization occurring in so many aspects of our lives. Progress has been slow because the downside is a fear of the unknown and a suspicion that those we do not know do not share our goals.

It can be argued that Angle was exclusionary, but the truth is he was exclusionary only to those who did not share his passion for orthodontic excellence. He readily entered into communication and union with those outside North America whom he perceived as sharing his interest. The spirit of Angle is inclusive for all who share the goals of orthodontic excellence.

We have a history of reorganizing ourselves to adapt to changing needs. It is arrogant to ignore the ability of others outside our sphere to contribute to orthodontic knowledge. Indeed, it is contrary to the Angle philosophy. Last year 70% of the articles submitted to *The Angle Orthodontist* for publication were from countries outside the United States. This is evidence enough of the interest that is present elsewhere in the world. Now is the time for our society to unite potential sources of information and expand beyond the geopolitical borders of the 20th century. Orthodontics does not have geopolitical borders. It is time for the Angle society to become more global and to reorganize itself to better serve all of orthodontics all over the world.

REFERENCES

1. Hahn GW. The history and philosophy of the Edward H. Angle Society of Orthodontia. Paper presented at: 25th Anniversary Biennial Meeting of the Edward H. Angle Society of Orthodontists; November 6, 1955; Chicago, Ill. Available at: <http://www.angle.org/anglonline/?requestindex-html> [click on Society Members, Select a Page, and History of the Angle Society].