

History of the International Association of Paediatric Dentistry Part 3: Samuel D. Harris and some early pressures for international developments

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Introduction

In July 1952 the American Society of Dentistry for Children (ASDC) celebrated its Silver Anniversary. In August, Sam Harris (see Part 2 of this series, Vol. 5, No. 1) decided that the time was right to encourage the formation of similar societies in other countries. He wrote to George Scott Page in England, Maria Ines Egoxcue in Argentina, and George Neville Davies in New Zealand, demonstrating the value of his international contacts. Harris informed them of the ASDC's celebrations, described its record of accomplishment for children in the USA and pointed out that its Executive Council supported his recommendation that the Society should stimulate the formation of similar groups in other countries. Harris stated: "Our ultimate aim would be establishment of an International Council for the advancement of dentistry for children."

Harris informed Egoxcue that Kenneth Easlick felt the idea was good and had recommended that she be contacted. He asked her for the names of two or three other key people in "her part of the world" who could help. In particular, he asked: "(1) Would an organization similar to ASDC be desirable and practical in Argentina, [or] in other countries?; (2) could the ASDC help you, and would our suggestions be welcome?; (3) what would you say to ultimate organization of an international council for the advancement of dentistry for children?"

Supportive replies were received. Egoxcue wrote from Buenos Aires to say that the organization of an international council would promote closer co-operation and mutual understanding among colleagues devoted to children. She was happy to hear of Easlick, who had helped her so much with his invaluable teaching and stimulating personality. This was but one

further example of how the world's children's dentistry fraternity grew together. Although organizations are important, in the end it is the power of the individual to stimulate and teach which has most influence. By 26 September the replies had been reported to the ASDC Executive Council, which encouraged Harris to take further action. Always eager, he was already drafting a constitution to be sent to key people around the world for their comments; it was to form the basis for the organization of societies in other countries. He also distributed on 29 October a draft constitution for an international council of dentistry for children, to serve as a liaison body for the national societies.

Harris received support from Carlos A. Criner, Presidente de la Sociedad Cubana de Odontologia Infantil (Cuban Pedodontic Society). Criner's letter dated 6 November written from Havana confirmed support and pointed out that their successful Society had been started in 1946, based mostly on the principles of ASDC, of which they were honorary members. Although the first of its kind in Latin America, by then there were similar societies in other countries, for example Argentina and Dominica. Harris told Criner that he was corresponding with some 60 dentists throughout the world, most of whom were enthusiastic. Amendments from Kenneth Easlick, Walter McBride, Philip Blackerby and Harold Hillenbrand were incorporated into a further draft mailed to 10 of the 60 people. Criner's comments were sought. Again there is evidence of international fraternity, Harris acknowledging that he would pass on regards from Criner to Walter McBride and Alfred (Al) Seyler (about whom Scott Page in London had also spoken warmly).

On 30 December, Harris wrote to Page, Davies,

Egoxcue, Criner, Alicia Lazo de la Vega (Mexico) and Thomas L. Icaza (Nicaragua). He set a deadline of 15 January 1953 for receiving comments on the proposed constitution and by-laws so that a final draft could be sent out in February. Harris said he was still collecting lists of dentists in countries not yet contacted. The general consensus was that both national societies and an international council should be created. There would be a call for a Pan-American and a Continental (i.e. European) Council of Dentistry for Children by the summer of 1954. It was hoped to organize an International Council of Dentistry for Children by the summer of 1955. In his letter to Page, Harris pointed out he had also written to Peter James in London.

By 1953, Harris advised inquirers that formation of any societies of dentistry for children should be separate from, but work closely with, their respective national dental societies. He mentioned that valuable assistance was being received from the American Dental Association and the International Dental Federation (FDI).

On 13 January, Criner wrote accepting the national constitution and by-laws subject to some minor modifications to adapt them "to local official regulations concerning societies". He indicated that the proposed constitution for an international council had also been agreed by his Council. He wrote that the next Cuban congress would be held on 28–30 March 1953 and he invited Harris, Easlick and Seyler to attend as guests of honour.

By 16 March, Harris was in correspondence with over 80 dentists in 42 countries, many of whose names had been received from Hillenbrand, Easlick, Stanley Tylman and Gerald Leatherman (of the FDI). A questionnaire sought information on the degree of organizational development within the various countries. He asked: "(1) Do you at present have a national society of dentistry for children? If so, when and where was it organized?; (2) if not, would the formation of such a society be helpful to your country?; (3) would you like to gather a nucleus of dentists interested in dentistry for children to consider organization?; (4) would you prefer suggestions for the formation simply of a study club at this time?; (5) when and where will the next meeting of your national dental society take place?; (6) will you please list other comments to help guide us in appraising the situation relative to dentistry for children in your country?" Harris learned that in some countries study clubs had already been formed. Upon receiving the draft constitution and by-laws, a Chilean Society

of Dentistry for Children had been promptly formed.

On 6 March, Harris told Page that letters from Canada, Cuba and Mexico supported Page's opinion "that if the [British] Society could grow out of the study group we have started it will have firmer roots than one started as an offspring of the FDI or British Dental Association". Harris had told Leatherman how societies were being developed by individuals, as had the ASDC. On 30 January 1953 he suggested that most help from the FDI could be given by encouraging the formation of societies in other countries. Harris pointed out that the idea of a National Council of Dentistry for Children went back to the formation of the ASDC, when the value of such an organization was already evident. The idea had recurred periodically and came to the fore during preparations for the Silver Anniversary of the ASDC. Harris welcomed Leatherman's suggestion that an international commission be set up by the FDI to co-operate with Harris' project. He felt that such a commission would focus special attention on the value of dental services for children and could implement the presentation of papers and clinical material at FDI meetings (possibly concurrent with meetings of the International Council of Dentistry for Children). Harris confirmed that although he had only dealt with individuals he would be happy to contact the national associations named by Leatherman and Hillenbrand.

Some recipients of the first letter cautiously enquired about the ASDC. Therefore Harris wrote to Dr J. Firorini in Valletta, Malta, on 7 October to explain its activities and make-up. He hoped that this background would encourage Firorini and his colleagues to form a study club or society and, as usual, he offered his support.

On 30 January 1954, Harris confirmed to Criner his arrangements to spend 22 and 23 February with the Cuban Society. He offered to address them on "30 minutes in a pedodontic practice", to review the current situation on organizing dentistry on the world scene, or "just relax and do nothing but enjoy the pleasure of visiting with you". So, by 1954, Harris was strongly aligning himself with a number of South American countries. The foundations were being laid for a Pan-American Council (see part 4 of this history).

Some extracts from Harris' suggested constitution and by-laws for a national society

The preamble written by Harris stated that the name

of each Society was to be The [name of country] Society of Dentistry for Children, formed:

“To advance the dental health and contribute to the general health and welfare of children, particularly in.....[name of country].

To work closely with similar societies, to be established later in other sections of the world; and, ultimately, to serve as part of an International Council of Dentistry for Children.

To improve and to disseminate knowledge in dentistry for children.

To spread this knowledge to other fields of related endeavour and to the public.

To secure improved and more widespread dental services for children.

To contribute to a healthier and a happier humanity and to a more secure world.

To walk hand in hand with all people of all lands towards a better tomorrow.”

The purpose of each Society was

“To improve all of the activities involved in dentistry for children and to advance and spread the knowledge and performance in this field of service throughout [name of country].”

There were to be three classes of membership: Active, Associate, and Honorary. *Active members* would be members of their national dental associations; only they could vote. *Associate membership* would be limited to representatives of associated organizations working in related fields.

Component (sectional) units of dentistry for children would be organized on a local basis and then enrolled into the national society following application and acceptance, and delegates would represent them at national meetings of the society. The officers of each Society would be a President, President-elect, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and an Editor. The Secretary would provide an official letter and report to the membership every 2 months. There were also to be a number of standing committees, each of three people; examples were the School and Examinations Board Committee and the Community Dental Programs Committee.

School and Examinations Board Committee. Such a committee would record the time and degree of emphasis allotted to the teaching of pedodontics in dental colleges; work with official educational agencies to raise the requirements and standards of teaching dentistry for children, and ensure proper emphasis was given to this subject; and maintain liaison with dental examining boards to gain a proper evaluation of children’s dentistry capabilities in licensing examinations.

Community Dental Programs Committee. This committee would study community dental service and dental educational programmes for children; set desirable standards for such programmes; assist in the formation of programmes in local communities by working with any component unit when requested; and maintain liaison with other bodies so that they may better assist in the promotion of dental health.