

# History of the International Association of Paediatric Dentistry

## Part 4: The Pan-American Council of Dentistry for Children (Consejo Panamericano de Odontologia Infantil)

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### *The Miami Convention*

Part 3 of this series outlined how Sam Harris developed contacts in many countries. His letters went finally to 120 dentists in 51 countries. As a result, an additional 19 countries, 13 on the American continent, formed their own societies of dentistry for children.

On 11 May 1954 the Pan-American Council of Dentistry for Children (PAC) (Consejo Panamericano de Odontologia Infantil) was established, with Sam Harris as President, Carlos Criner of Havana, Cuba, as Vice-President and Antonio Montero (also of Havana) as Secretary/Treasurer. Harris arranged the first meeting of the PAC in Miami in October 1954 – the Miami Convention. A draft constitution and by-laws was mailed to delegates planning to attend the Convention.

Earlier, on 8 June, he had written to Bertha Acuirre of Mexico, who was going to the convention, rehearsing his thoughts about the creation of a Pan-American Council, and pointing out that, since talking at meetings in Cuba and Mexico, he had written a book 'A Compendium of Pedodontic Practice' which was to be his contribution to the launching of the PAC. Al Seyler was to publish the first chapters in the *Journal of Dentistry for Children*, with blank sheets for clinicians to add their own techniques of special value to them in their practices. These in turn would be published in the *Journal* and in the final published book. The idea was 'to keep the book simple, practical and small so that its use may become as widespread as possible'. He said Carlos Criner (Cuba) had asked

for it to be reprinted in Spanish. Harris suggested that all profits should go to the pedodontic society of the country in which the book was sold.

Harris suggested that the PAC should consider the election of a bilingual (English-Spanish) secretary, as most activity would be by correspondence, perhaps by monthly bulletins. He suggested that each Society pay its official delegate's fares to meetings, and that the meetings should be devoted to both business and technical clinics. He went on: "Philanthropists in each country should be encouraged to make grants to the council programs but also to help defray part of the cost of the expenses for delegates who may be handicapped financially because of rates of exchange or the extreme distance to future council meetings". He also suggested that Council meetings should be held every year or two, circulating among the countries to coincide with their annual dental conventions. Subcommittees could develop a common basis and establish mutual advantages for teaching, publication, publicity, programmes and practice.

On 13 August, Harris wrote to Napoleon Romero Hernandez in El Salvador that the response to his letter announcing the Miami meeting had been gratifying. Although Argentina was unable to attend, 15–20 other representatives would be present. Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominica and Haiti had indicated they would be represented. Harris pointed out that in his draft constitution he had proposed Council meetings "only once each 3 years", because of the international currency differences and the long distances involved. After the first meeting in Miami he hoped

that the next one would be held in Mexico City or another central city location in 1955.

On 18 September, Harris wrote to Criner that everyone seemed satisfied with the proposed constitution and by-laws, which should save considerable time at the meeting. He thought it would be a good idea to have only one official delegate from each country represented in Miami. If more than one person came they could elect a delegate who could vote or hold office.

Following the Miami Convention Harris wrote to Montero (30 November) suggesting that, in order to "initiate your thoughts as Secretary", Montero should "write to each society of dentistry for children informing them of our favorable action in organising the PAC meeting at Miami, who was at the meeting and what happened; ask the society for confirmation of their representatives' enrolment; ask them for the names of their official delegate and alternate to the Council for 1954-55". He suggested, in addition, that an announcement about the PAC should be sent to all national dental associations in the Western Hemisphere. Noting that Montero would need to purchase stationary, Harris sent a personal cheque for 75 dollars. On the same day, Harris wrote to Antonio Frago in Mexico City commenting on the success of the Miami meeting and pointing out that a few days earlier the ASDC had officially voted for membership of the PAC.

#### *Plans for the second PAC meeting*

The PAC considered two venues for their next meeting: Havana and Mexico City. Criner was eager to have the meeting in Havana, but Harris preferred Mexico City, provided it had the official approval of the Mexican Society of Dentistry for Children. He asked Frago if he would serve as Chairman of the local arrangements committee. Maria Navarra wrote from Tigris on 31 January 1955 to confirm the Mexican Society's enthusiasm for the meeting. As a member of the Scientific Committee she was charged with seeking the names of 'outstanding dentists' who could contribute to the success of the meeting. She asked Harris for suggestions and enquired if there were a directory of American and foreign dentists.

On 2 March, Montero sent to each country represented in Miami translations of the constitution and by-laws and a questionnaire concerning the number of dentists and pedodontists. A translation

was to appear in the next issue of the Journal, thus reaching countries not yet represented on the PAC.

On 17 May, Harris wrote to Montero that confirmation of US and Canadian membership would soon be received. Argentina had stated through Dr Bengochea that they would soon be enrolling. Harris suggested that Criner should contact those who had made enquiries prior to Miami in order to ask if their countries planned to send representatives to the convention in Mexico. By 11 October, Montero had received responses from Costa Rica (Raymond Pauly, the official delegate), Cuba (Criner, the official delegate), Chile (Tapia Tepassier, who would not be able to attend), Asuncion (Vera Viercio, not able to attend), Columbia (Dr Cuellar, not able to attend but requested invitations for three others), Nicaragua (they had just constituted their society and would be represented), Guatamala (not able to send a delegate), and Canada (not able to send a delegate). The convention was held in Mexico City from 21 to 22 January 1955 and was a great success, greeted in the prime national publication *Todo* as 'un gran evento científico' (a great scientific event).

#### *Expansion of the PAC*

On 1 May 1956, Montero sent out a report of the activities of the PAC and encouraged affiliates in the three sections (north, central and caribbean, and south) to correspond and arrange annual meetings in accordance with the by-laws. He reported that Benjamin Gomez Herrera, President of the Affiliation Committee, had corresponded with prospective PAC members in several countries: Ecuador, Honduras, Haiti, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic. Many had already constituted a society and would shortly join the Council. The current members were: American Society of Dentistry for Children; Canadian Society of Dentistry for Children; Sociedad Argentina de Odontopediatria; Sociedad Colombiana de Odontologia Infantil [by 1 September 1956 = Sociedad de Odontopediatria]; Sociedad Cubana de Odontologia Infantil; Sociedad Mexicana de Odontologia Infantil; Sociedad Nicaraguense de Odontologia Infantil; Sociedad Panameña de Odontologia Infantil.

On 5 May 1957, President-elect Benjamin Gomez Herrera of Columbia wrote to Harris from Bogota and stated that during the past year the following countries had joined: Study Club of Children's

Dentistry in Guatemala; Salvadorian Society for Children's Dentistry and the Uruguayan Society of Children's Dentistry. Santo Domingo had voiced a desire to join but had not yet done so. There had been correspondence with a number of other Latin American countries, but many had not yet replied or had expressed difficulty in forming societies or groups. Victor Gonzales Mendoza, Chairman of the *Gaceta Odontologica* of Venezuela, had personally taken a hand in organizing a Venezuelan society, which was constituted on 13 March 1957 with the object of joining the Council. Edrizio Barbosa Pinto, President of the Society in Pernambuco, Brazil, had requested individual membership, because there was difficulty in forming a national society. President-elect Gomez Herrera asked Dr Freudenthal to contact Pinto to help him form a Brazilian society.

#### *The third PAC meeting*

By 1958, steps were being taken towards organizing a third PAC meeting. However, difficult times were ahead. On 13 January, Montero sought Harris's forgiveness for his delay in replying to a letter dated 17 December 1957: "You must know from the papers, the situation in Cuba is reaching a climax, and we are all doing a little for the revolution. Thanks to God and to our brave people, we are free again and able to dedicate our efforts to other aims". He said that a letter from Gomez Herrera indicated that the Colombian Government had offered financial help towards organizing a meeting coinciding with a meeting of the Council.

On 5 April, Montero wrote to Harris stating that he had met Gomez Herrera in Miami on 28 March to discuss three major topics: first, establishment of a Children's Dental Health Week similar to an existing event in the USA – although directed by Council it would take place in all the affiliated countries at the same time; secondly, establishment of a Slogan and Symbol, for which purpose they appointed a committee consisting of Schweizer, Rebeca Minutto and Batista Mena; finally, the institution of a Diploma of Recognition to be awarded to people of outstanding merit in the educational or professional aspects of dentistry for children. Three months prior to the Dental Health Week, each constituent society was to nominate people considered to have rendered meritorious work, adding their reasons and a bibliography. The

Executive Committee would select one candidate from each country. Diplomas would be awarded at the bi-annual meeting of the Council to the people nominated or, in their absence, to the official delegate from that country. Montero said he was aware of the danger of selecting one person from many in a country, and also the problem of a single award in countries where dentistry for children is well advanced.

Montero and Gomez Herrera had discussed the problem of Argentina, where two groups were involved. Montero felt that the PAC should consider every interested group regardless of their "personal or political differences". Nevertheless, he hoped they could find someone to get the two groups to recognize each other. An example of such co-operative working was seen in Brazil, where four groups were accepted as four different affiliates by the Council. Gomez Herrera had suggested they should consider the possibility of involving Argentina more, perhaps by asking them to edit an official publication of the Council for the next period.

Montero listed for Harris the committees which had been appointed and their Chairmen: Membership (Al Anderson), Public Relations (Sam Harris), Professional Relations (Maria I Navarra, Uruguay), Budget (Alicia Lazo, Mexico), Dental Schools and Examining Board (Scweitzer, Argentina), Publicity and Dental Programs (Arturo Gonzalez, Colombia), Constitution and By-Laws (Toni Montero, Cuba) and Committee on Philanthropy (Carlos Criner, Cuba). Montero pointed out that until further notice his address would be c/o Dr S. H. Halper, in Bloomfield, New Jersey, rather than Cuba.

Harris wrote to Gomez Herrera on 17 December, congratulating him on the work to develop a programme for the meeting in Bogota, Colombia. He said that all the people suggested were well known in pedodontics. Harris mentioned that Criner had told him that some countries already had an established date for a Dental Health Week and it would be difficult for them to change because of their close association with other groups.

On 12 August 1959, Harold Kane Addelston, President of the ASDC, invited Gomez Herrera, as President of the PAC, to attend the ASDC annual meeting in New York City on 12 September. He wrote that the presence of Gomez Herrera, 'representing the dentists of your country who are concerned with better dentistry for children, will add a special grace to the occasion'. A copy of

the latter was sent to the Ministerio do Educacion in Bogota.

On 8 January 1960, Harris wrote to Gomez Herrera about a number of Council matters, including modification of the PAC by-laws to permit inclusion of more than one established society in countries such as Brazil and Argentina, where the individual groups were not yet working as one. He mentioned that the American Dental Association has asked for a clearer definition of what the practice of dentistry for children should include. He said that when the American Academy of Pedodontists had prepared a response it would be available for the PAC. He emphasized that each national council component should be closely linked to its own national dental association and that the PAC might deem it advisable to affiliate with the Pan-American Union or the Children's Inter-American Institute.

The third PAC meeting, the first Pan-American Congress on Dentistry for Children, was held in Bogota, Colombia, on 21–27 February 1960. Opened by Minister of Health José Valderrama, the Congress was a great success, with simultaneous translation and earphones available to about 150 delegates. It was well publicized in the local paper *Estampa* on 29 February. On 3 March, Harris wrote to Gomez Herrera congratulating him on the successful meeting.

#### *Mounting difficulties*

The mounting inter-American tension between the USA and Cuba affected the PAC. Sadly, it became impossible for Secretary Montero to function from Havana. President Albert (Al) L. Anderson wrote to Montero on 22 March 1961 from San Diego in California: "It is the consensus of opinion of the Executive Committee that we at least appoint a Secretary *pro-tem* of the PAC until things have smoothed out in our relationship from a State Department standpoint between the different countries involved in the Council and your country. Every member of the Executive Committee has expressed a feeling of confidence and thanks to you for the wonderful job that you have done for the Council during the past years, and we are all praying and hoping that sometime in the very near future you can once again accept the position of Secretary of the organization. This position will be held open for you and as soon as it can be worked

out, we will await for your return to the group. We realize that your many duties at the present time have made it almost impossible for you to carry out your normal correspondence". Anderson felt it would be wise to transfer all the PAC files to the new Secretary through whichever country Montero felt would be the easiest. Anderson offered to pay out of his own pocket for the shipment.

Montero replied from Havana on 10 April, confirming that he had been following the Council's activities through copies of letters which had been sent to him. He would send the Council's correspondence and other documents to the new Secretary via Anderson; this was particularly important as the position was likely to go to Otto Monendez of Guatemala, a country in great tension with Cuba. He asked to be kept informed of the Council's progress and offered to help in any way possible.

Montero wrote to Harris on 29 June. He said that the files had been delivered to Dr Taborgo of the World Health Organization who would take them to Mexico, and from there forward them to Anderson. He said "the matter of writing is not as delicate as you surmise, at least at this end". He continued: "Incidentally, your letter had gum tape around one end with a stamp in English that read: 'damaged in handling in the postal service'. Since this is the first time this has happened I mention it". Montero said that Harris would not embarrass his position in any way by writing and hoped that he would do so periodically. Montero went on: "This is *not* the regime of terror that a biased propaganda is trying to make it appear". He pointed out that Criner was no longer the School, having resigned in March "along with others who could not stand, apparently, the change of 'status' brought about by the revolution". By then the staff of the Dental School was composed, with the exception of about 100 old professors, of very young people "who are working very hard with the sincere hope of improving dentistry in our country". He went on: "It is too bad that you and the rest of the American people cannot come at this time and visit our country. But I do hope that the conditions prevailing at the present will improve and that we will be able to live in peace and dedicate all our efforts to positive aims". He thanked Harris for his prolonged friendship over the years. On 14 March 1962, Criner wrote from Havana that day by day the situation was getting worse. Montero continued to work at the School.

A further meeting had been planned for Guatemala in 1962, with a promise from its government to underwrite the cost. Unfortunately, political tensions grew, both in and between some of the countries. On 19 September 1962, Maria Inés Navarra, President-elect of the PAC, wrote to Anderson from Montevideo. She agreed with his suggestion of a meeting in Miami in October 1962, but was concerned that Anderson had received only two other responses: an affirmative reply from Dr Pazamino and an indication from Gomez Herrera that "his going there is not likely". Navarra told Anderson she would be in Miami on 26 October 1962 for she was confident that every "compounding unit [national group] would help so that we can elect new authorities and go on working". She had previously (19th April 1961) suggested to Anderson that units be asked to extend the mandate of the elected authorities until the end of 1962 because of the impossibility of meeting earlier. She assumed that Anderson had not done this as she had not received letters referring to consultation with members of the Executive and the Uruguayan Society. She wrote: "Now all the authorities are out of office and if we do not take advantage of the attendance at Miami to change the present situation returning to normalcy and to elect new members, I as the only authority in office shall have the entire responsibility of reorganising the Council". She continued: "Let us make a maximum effort to get there, I pray you, to legalize the situation and gather the assembly in October in Miami. Will you please help me?" Copies of her letter were sent to Gomez Herrera, Pazmiño, Garcia Salas, Batista Mena and Harris.

Harris replied to Navarra on 27 September 1962 suggesting that the PAC Executive Committee be empowered to carry on and transact business between the regular meetings. He said: "I expect that we may consider that the Executive Committee's decision not to hold a meeting to date and to call one immediately before or after the ASDC meeting [i.e. in Miami] will be sufficient". Harris went on: "I agree completely that a PAC meeting must be held quickly if this important organization is to be preserved". He emphasized that the whole matter had been of deep concern to Anderson.

The Council met in Miami on 25 October 1962. Plans were made for continuing the PAC, but any remaining optimism faded. Divisions were brought on by tensions between and within contending political forces in the various member countries.

Former close friends became hopelessly divided politically and professionally.

On 25 October 1963 Harris wrote to Gomez Herrera, who had moved from Colombia to the University of Venezuela, saying there had been little recent news of the PAC. He said: "This is not as Dr Navarra planned nor in accord with her programme outlined to us in Miami. I do hope that she is not ill, for almost a year has passed since her ascendance to the office of President and, to date, neither I nor Al (Anderson) have been informed of any plans or progress". There were still some countries with more than one organized group that found it difficult to work together for the common good. Maria Navarra had not succeeded in repairing the rift between the Argentinian pedodontic groups. Harris wrote that Walter McBride had been in Ecuador for 2 months whilst Al Seyler had left in the past week for a trip to Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela. He hoped that something would be worked out to get the PAC back on its "highroad of accomplishment as was so evident at the outset in Mexico and more recently as its sparkling meeting in Colombia". Harris told Gomez Herrera that if he could stimulate Maria Navarra to action and the resumption of the PAC programme, he would perform a major service for pedodontics.

On the following day (26 October), Harris wrote to Navarra in Montevideo, Uruguay. At the recent ASDC meeting he had learned that Anderson, the immediate Past-President, also had heard nothing about the PAC. He went on: "I am alarmed for fear your health may not be good and that this is the reason your many good plans announced in Miami have apparently not been launched, or taken effect". Harris said he had just received a letter from Gomez Herrera who was equally concerned.

So the PAC Council went into limbo. There were requests to resume its activities but conditions never seemed quite right. With so many people from Central and South American indicating that they would attend the ASDC Golden Anniversary meeting scheduled for California, that seemed a very good time to consider resumption of the PAC. However, because political relations between several of the countries were still unsettled it was decided not to re-activate the PAC then.

In any case, as Harris wrote in 1970, by then there was considerable evidence that by the time of the ASDC's 50th anniversary enough other countries would have a society of dentistry for children to

make the formation of a World Council a happy reality. In fact, they did not have too long to wait; the world of dentistry for children was already on the move. Harris knew from his contacts around the world that many national societies now existed, with

England, Japan, Israel and France steadily moving ahead. The British movement and its achievement in holding the first recognized International Symposium on Child Dental Health in 1967 will be described in Part 5.