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HAIR TRANSPLANT forum INTERNATIONAL



Presidential Address

by Russell Knudsen, MBBS, Sydney, Australia

(The following was the 1997 Presidential Address, presented on October 16, 1997, in Barcelona, Spain.)

Let me begin by thanking both the membership and the Board of Governors for the privilege and honor of becoming your fifth President. On a personal note I must pay tribute especially to two people that have been responsible for this honor. Firstly my wife Anne, who sadly, and ironically, as my biggest and most loyal supporter, misses this moment due to temporary ill-health. She will see her many friends in this room at the next meeting in Washington. Secondly, and no less importantly, my friend and mentor Richard Shiell who has wisely and generously guided and supported me throughout my professional career. It would not have been possible without either of you.

What excites me most about today is how the ISHRS has demonstrated its international nature. We have 667 physician members and 89 assistant members who represent 37 countries. This meeting in Barcelona is our second outside of the US in our first five years, is our first meeting in Europe and I have the privilege of becoming your first non-US President. As well, 46% of your Board members are non-US. Truly an international society.

The ISHRS is a big business and our support staff in Chicago are vital to our success. Christina Achziger is

our excellent Executive Director and we have 14 part-time support staff directly involved in the management of our society. As well we have developed a successful relationship with both our public relations firm—Dragonette—and our Website developer.

The continued success of our society is in no small way due to the wise and successful leadership shown by our past-Presidents. Dow Stough in 1993 was our Founding President followed by Paul Straub in 1994, Robert Leonard in 1995 and James Vogel in 1996, your outgoing President. "Top-Dogs" indeed!

The success of this meeting is due to the diligent efforts of our Program Chairmen Robert Haber and Patrick Frechet and our Live Operating Director Ramon Vila-Rovira. Thanks go to them and to Deborah Elliott for her terrific work in organizing the Assistant's Meeting.

I believe that our biggest achievements in 1997 were firstly in public relations, with a succession of supportive articles appearing in US and international publications. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, ISHRS developed and released its Website — www.ISHRS.org., which recorded over 12,000 "hits" or visits in its first 3 months! We are only beginning to understand the incredi-

ble power and significance of this technology that will profoundly affect the way we inform the public about our specialty. As a benefit of membership, the ISHRS is listing the entire membership details—name, address, phone number—on our Website at no cost. Individual homepages are able to be designed and purchased for this Website. This price will be discounted during this meeting to \$550 US but will from

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next week be \$600 US. You fail to support this initiative at your own peril.

There are still challenges ahead for us as physicians. The most significant, I believe, being the current medico-legal environment. Our results are better than ever but medico-legal claims are increasing. Why? I believe it is a combination of factors relating to increased patient expectations, a willingness to criticize colleagues' work for competitive (commercial) gain and lastly, our favorite scapegoat, lawyer enthusiasm for encouraging litigation. How do we meet this challenge? An old, but wise, saying states that we must change the things we can change, accept the things we can't change, and have the wisdom to differentiate between the two. Let's look at these factors individually:

1. *Patient Expectations*—this we can change by controlling the marketing others do on our behalf and we must be careful ourselves not to raise patient expectations during the consultation—the dreaded “full head of hair.”

2. *Criticism of Colleagues*—in the words of John Dickinson (1768): “By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall.” Unjustified criticism of colleagues brings the whole field into disrepute and we need to remember that as a whole, the hair replacement industry already has low public esteem. Honesty with your patients is paramount, but implied criticism is very different than explicit, self-serving criticism. For example, a patient disappointed with a colleague's work might be encouraged by your stating that you understand his disappointment and reassuring him that improvement is possible. Contrast this with an observation that the colleague was incompetent and luckily you can fix the patient's “botched” result. Firstly, this makes the patient aware that he has been damaged and implies he should consider doing something about it. Secondly, a prejudicial statement, which you might think defensible, will encourage the patient to hold you just as accountable regarding the final result.

Hair restoration surgery is a difficult art, performed on often mildly obsessive

patients who continue to anguish over further hair loss. Don't encourage their fears by self-serving statements. The Australian experience is instructive.

The Australian Society of Hair Transplant Surgeons formed in 1983 with Richard Shiell as its Founding President and Mario Marzola as Secretary-Treasurer. Annual meetings were organized that had both a business and scientific purpose. The business meeting informed the members of the current state of the hair-loss industry and how we might position ourselves as a responsible advocate of transplant surgery. The scientific meetings shared knowledge to all members' benefit. It wasn't long before commercially competitive factors intervened with the result being a relative unwillingness to share and assist other members who were “on our turf,” particularly new physicians entering the field. Meetings lapsed, and after a two-year hiatus, only business meetings resumed. A cooperative effort was encouraged in relation to *Yellow Pages* advertising under our Society name. Soon we learned the value of cooperation with a general increase in friendliness, less inclination to secrecy regarding our own practices and a willingness to share knowledge with our colleagues. Scientific meetings resumed in

1995 and today our Society, though small, is cohesive and cooperative. We have a general unwillingness to criticize colleagues' work for commercial gain, the result being a very low incidence of medico-legal claims relating to hair restoration surgery. The direct benefit is a relatively low malpractice-insurance premium for this type of cosmetic surgery. Think before you speak!

The key to success for us all is communication with our patients AND communication with our colleagues. That is why meetings such as this are indispensable in fostering a successful environment for hair restoration surgery. Get to know your colleagues and competitors and it might become harder to “demonize” them. ISHRS Board policy is that we are committed to education of all our colleagues. We have a Code of Ethics that we expect members to adhere to but we do NOT see ourselves as a policing body to air or adjudicate member disputes.

Everyone of us should have as our goal a re-commitment to raising both public awareness of, and respect for, hair restoration surgery. The take-home message? It is both demeaning and unproductive to fight over the slice of the cake when everyone can gain by increasing the size of the cake. ■

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Editor's notes

by Richard Shiell, MBBS, Melbourne, Australia



The Barcelona meeting was an outstanding success, as several writers in this edition have testified.

P a s t President Jim Vogel and

Program Chairmen Robert Haber and Patrick Frechet are to be congratulated. We should highly commend Marc Avram and Francisco Jiminez who organized the workshops; Ramon Vila-Rovira, who arranged the live operating sessions; and Deborah Elliott, who organized the outstanding Assistant's Program. Special mention must be made to ISHRS Executive Director Achziger and her staff in Chicago, who were the lynch-pins to the entire undertaking.

Hearty congratulations to my fellow countryman Russell Knudsen for his election as President of the ISHRS for the ensuing year. He has worked very hard for the ISHRS since well before its official incorporation in 1993, and has thoroughly earned the honor bestowed upon him by his peers. Shelly Kabaker is Vice-President, Danny Rousso Secretary, Marcelo Gandelman Treasurer, and the meeting chairman for Washington is to be Paul Cotterill. James Arnold was elected to replace retiring Board member and Past President Bob Leonard.

Depth of Talent

The number of talented individuals in our organization never ceases to amaze me. This year was no exception, with an amazing array of papers and new inventions. Bill Rassman's "Carousel Implanter" stole the show, I think, but there were a number of other less glamorous devices which could sneak into our daily lives without fanfare and prove immensely useful. Rolf Nordstrom's

Silastic suture comes immediately to mind but there were many more. (See Jim Arnold's report of the meeting and "New Instruments.")

Seventh Birthday for *Forum*

Another year has passed for *Forum* — our seventh and my second as Editor. This year with the much appreciated assistance of Linda Campbell in Chicago, we managed to get our six editions out reasonably on schedule every two months. *Forum* continues to gain new readers and the advertisers continue to support us. We are averaging 24 pages per edition now, and this edition will be our second venture into color. We added a new regular feature this year with "Medico-legal Matters" sub-edited by ISHRS Past President Bob Leonard. Next year I will be adding "Scalp Dermatology" for the numerous non-dermatologists in our ranks. Another new feature will be "Net-Notes" with summaries of interesting Websites regarding hair-related matters and Internet addresses, so you can follow these up at your leisure. Shagufta Khan and Marcelo Gandelman offered their services for this page, and I have accepted both with gratitude.

Forum Editorship

The Board has renewed my appointment for a further year, and I hope that we can continue to provide our readers with material which is current, concise, informative, and entertaining. This was the idea of our founder, O'Tar Norwood, and one to which I too, am committed. Although we do not qualify as a peer-reviewed journal, in many ways we have the advantage. All material is reviewed by myself, a practicing hair restoration surgeon with 30 years experience, and I have no hesitation of seeking the advice of other experts if I have any reservations. This system ensures that new material is reviewed, but gets to the reader with all possible speed. Very little is ever rejected, but amendments are

sometimes suggested and usually gratefully acted upon by the authors concerned.

History has shown that the formal peer review system has its faults and tends to be immensely conservative. I was not surprised to hear from Norman Orentreich's own lips in Barcelona that his original paper on "Scalp Autografts" was rejected by his peers at America's premier dermatology journal when submitted in 1955, and it was the *Annals of the New York Academy of Science* which finally printed this historic work.

Forum has no pretensions to medical journal status but it is increasingly cited in lists of references. Many authors recognize how widely read it is within the hair restoration community and choose to use it to announce new techniques rather than wait for the prolonged process of publication in other journals. Experience in recent years has shown that many techniques in this rapidly developing field are already on the wane or even superseded by the time they appear in print in some journals.

"Happy Holiday"

Let me take this opportunity to wish all our readers a very Merry Christmas and a safe and happy holiday. For those of us in the Southern Hemisphere, it is our summer holiday period but I will be back to work in mid-January when I hope to see lots of letters and contributions to *Forum* on my desk. My sincere thanks to all of you who have contributed to our pages this year, and for those of you who have not, then 1998 sounds a good time to start your literary career. ■

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