

## The International Community

The past few years have served as a vivid reminder that we truly live in a world community. Gone are the past provincialism and isolation that separated individuals and cultures. Geographic divisions and distance no longer provide barriers to progress or protection from problems. We move relatively freely between continents and countries and, with some notable yet progressively fewer exceptions, cross borders without incident.

The problems of one country become the problems of the world. All nations have experienced economic hardships in the past few years and no society has been insulated. Whatever the prior level of affluence or poverty, the depressed world economy has made life more difficult for all. We have found that starvation is not the problem of a single people or geographic area—but is a world problem. The scandals of one nation are an embarrassment to the world. Failures of one element of the global family that would once have been reason for gloating or amusement now are a source of shared pain and concern. In short, we have begun to act and react as family members—helping, empathizing, and caring.

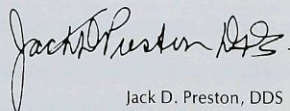
Sometimes, as we practice our profession, we might begin to feel that we can isolate ourselves from world problems. We dwell on the daily challenges of ministering to our patients and providing our skills to improve both oral health and mental well-being. We delight in meeting the technical challenges with which we are presented, and we attend to discrepancies that are measured in microns. We provide complex therapy and lose ourselves in our technical abilities and the nuances of patient care. We delight in our new materials, our technical toys, and our completed therapy. However, such provincial isolation is only a facade, a shallow barrier that is an illusion.

Prosthodontists cannot limit their concern to parochial problems, nor can they ignore the larger problems that confront their specialty. Most of us are active in numerous organizations, each of which has a particular focus and laudable goals. However, we should be concerned that in a large part of the world our specialty is not even recognized, and if it exists at all, it is only because an individual or small group has sought training abroad, returning with the needed skills to provide patients with

the benefits of specialization and becoming a nucleus for specialty organization.

The International College of Prosthodontists is the only group with global prosthodontic interests. It is difficult to organize a group that is so diverse in its ethnic, social, and political composition. There are many obstacles to developing an effective international voice for prosthodontics, but the International College has developed a structure for global establishment and advancement of prosthodontics. It also seeks to recognize and validate those qualified to practice as prosthodontists. Since the founding of the ICP, much of the work has been done by a small group of individuals, often at personal sacrifice. It is now time for this work to be assumed more broadly and more actively by international committees, with greatly enhanced participation. Activity with and by the International College does not compete with local or national societies. Rather, a premise of the founders has been that prosthodontics must be established internationally if it is to be strong locally. Local, national, and international societies are all needed if a chain is to be forged that is strong enough to unite prosthodontics as a universally established specialty.

On September 23–26, the International College of Prosthodontists is meeting in Bürgenstock, Switzerland, under the leadership of its president, Prof Peter Schäfer. The setting is idyllic, the program superb. I can only urge the reader to seriously consider attending this meeting and actively assuming a role in the ICP. As prosthodontists, we must expand our efforts into the world community professionally, just as we must do so socially and politically. The College offers that opportunity—and that challenge. For an outline of the program and registration information, refer to page 307 of this issue. Some individuals will always passively be served rather than serve. However, the very personality of prosthodontists demands activity—and the College is a deserving vehicle for challenging such efforts.



Jack D. Preston, DDS  
Editor-in-Chief