

The Scope and Content of Current Prosthodontic Research

It seems it would be simple to describe the scope of prosthodontic research by referring to a definition of prosthodontics, and there are many such definitions in textbooks and given by prosthodontic societies. An often cited and probably the most well-known definition is that of the Glossary of Prosthodontic Terms (ed 6, 1994), which defines prosthodontics as: "the branch of dentistry pertaining to the restoration and maintenance of oral function, comfort, appearance, and health of the patient by the restoration of natural teeth and/or the replacement of missing teeth and contiguous oral and maxillofacial tissues with artificial substitutes." This definition is well-established and it does not appear to be controversial; yet it has been questioned with respect to the level of oral function, comfort, appearance, etc, meant, and to the direct implications to estimation of treatment need. Is the goal the restoration of an ideal situation, or can modifications be made, and if so, to what degree are deviations from the ideal acceptable? It is an evident need of prosthodontic research to try to answer such questions, because there are more opinions than evidence-based knowledge in this field.

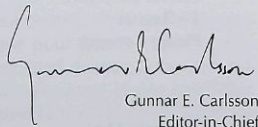
The traditional divisions separating prosthodontics into various treatment areas (such as complete dentures and other removable prosthodontics, fixed prosthodontics, maxillofacial prosthetics, and implant prosthodontics) have been used to create departments of prosthodontics in academia. Prosthodontic research was then defined as research performed in such institutions. However, there are several disciplines, such as dental materials, occlusion, oral physiology, operative dentistry, gerodontology, etc, that are related to prosthodontics but organized differently at different universities. These disciplines may be included in, attached to, or independent of the departments of prosthodontics. Is research in these related fields to be included in prosthodontic research? In a questionnaire investigation performed a couple of years ago by the International College of Prosthodontists (ICP), whose members come from many countries in different parts of the world, it was found that the answers to that question varied strongly. Some said that prosthodontic research should be limited to the main treatment areas, others were generous to include a variety of related disciplines, and a few, especially Asian colleagues, considered research in oral function and physiology to be the central and most important field for prosthodontic research.

The programs of large conferences on prosthodontics provide information about current prosthodontic research. The last issue of the IJP (Jan/Feb 1998) published abstracts

from the recent ICP conference in Malta (October 1997), which was attended by prosthodontists from all over the world. A scrutiny of the 114 abstracts in the oral and poster sessions emanating from 24 countries showed great variation in choice of subject among the presenters. An attempt to classify the abstracts (such a classification is difficult to perform because several abstracts can be assigned to more than one group) gave a long list of branches: basic science, biomaterials/dental materials, clinical methods and trials, complete dentures, education, esthetics, fixed prosthodontics, gerodontology, implants, maxillofacial prosthetics, occlusion, oral function/oral physiology, psychology, removable partial dentures, and temporomandibular disorders. Almost half of the abstracts dealt with implants and occlusion/oral physiology/TMD. Other major fields were clinical methods and trials, dental materials, and esthetics. More rare were the reports of studies on the traditional treatment areas—complete, fixed, and removable partial dentures. It was interesting to note the inclusion of a few presentations on the educational, psychological, and basic science aspects of prosthodontics.

The reports also comprised a wide range of methods, from those used in the basic sciences such as biochemical, histologic, microbiologic, and cell tissue culture investigations, to several classic as well as new clinical and laboratory methods for the study of dental materials and prosthodontic therapies, including conventional clinical examination, electromyography, psychologic questionnaires, radiography, and scanning electron microscopy. The conference gave a valuable overview of the current interests in the speciality, but it also showed a great variation in the orientation of prosthodontic research around the world.

The ambition of *The International Journal of Prosthodontics* is to continue to publish scientific papers reflecting the rapid development in prosthodontics and related disciplines. The ICP conference and other similar events have highlighted the great geographic variation existing in this development. It is obvious that a further discussion about the scope of prosthodontic research and its future direction is needed. The IJP would welcome such contributions.



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