

ADVANCING THE SPECIALTY OF ORAL AND MAXILLOFACIAL PATHOLOGY



Brad W. Neville, DDS

Distinguished University Professor
Director, Division of Oral Pathology, College of Dental Medicine
Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina, USA

As a member of the Oral Pathology community, it is a distinct honour and pleasure for me to be asked to provide some editorial comments for the Oral & Maxillofacial Pathology Journal. The specialty of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology encompasses a wide range of activities ranging from laboratory services, clinical patient care, basic science research, clinical and translational research, and teaching. Based on our unique training and experience, we are capable of providing specialized services that

cannot be found anywhere else in the health care system.

Because Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology is a small specialty that is sometimes perceived as being outside the mainstream of the dental profession, it is easy for us to become forgotten or neglected. Therefore, to advance our specialty, we must constantly strive to demonstrate our value to our patients, colleagues, and universities.

For our patients, this means that we cannot hide in our laboratories behind our microscopes, but we should also actively

involve ourselves in the clinical diagnosis and management of patients. Our understanding of disease on the microscopic level enables us to translate that knowledge and expertise to the clinical level.

For our colleagues, this means helping them with the clinical care of their patients. Our biopsy laboratory services are only one means by which we can provide this assistance. Hardly a day goes by that I do not receive several phone calls, letters, and emails with clinical photographs and radiographs for my diagnostic or treatment opinions. Prompt, thoughtful replies to these queries not only provide colleagues with immediate assistance in direct patient care, they also help to promote future biopsy specimens and patient referrals. Similarly, we must also seek the opportunity to provide continuing education courses, which allow us share our knowledge and promote the importance of our specialty.

For our universities, our value is demonstrated by actively participating in all aspects of academic life. Simply stated, the

purpose of a college or university is “the advancement of knowledge.” We advance knowledge in two major ways: 1) sharing our expertise with our students and residents in the lecture hall and clinic; and 2) conducting and publishing original research. Additionally, it is important for us to participate in various administrative duties (e.g., committees), which are a necessary part of the overall academic enterprise. Once again, we cannot adequately promote the value of ourselves and our specialty by hiding away in the laboratory.

Research is a critical component of the academic world. However, each of us possesses a different set of capabilities when it comes to such scholarly activities. For some oral pathology academicians, basic science research is the major duty that occupies most of their daily jobs. Other oral pathologists have duties and interests more attuned to the arena of clinical patient care, with research being emphasized to a lesser degree.

Personally, I fall into this latter category. However, scholarly activities in some capacity

are an important responsibility for all faculty members.

Because my particular research interests have always been more clinically oriented, I would like to make the following simple recommendation to younger oral pathologists who are beginning their careers in similar positions: **START WRITING!** Scholarly activity (i.e., research) encompasses a wide range of pursuits. Many younger faculty members can feel intimidated by the process of identifying research topics, writing manuscripts, and submitting them for publication. If you do not have strong research training and background, start with small, simple reports of unique cases from your biopsy or clinical service. The impact of simple case reports is usually small, but they can add valuable information to our knowledge base. Just as important, performing the research on a particular topic will increase YOUR knowledge base, effectively making you an expert on that particular subject.

With each paper that you submit, your confidence and ability will increase.

Hopefully, small case reports will lead to more significant papers on larger case series or population-based studies of oral disease. Additionally, oral pathologists are often called upon to collaborate on research projects with our colleagues – both in the clinical and basic science arenas. By demonstrating your interest in scholarly activities, you will become the “go to” person when other faculty need the expertise of an oral disease specialist.

In the final analysis, none of us precisely knows the future course of our individual careers. However, by participating in all aspects of our specialty (teaching, research, and service), you can be prepared to take advantage of future opportunities that present themselves. Your active participation will not only help your individual career, it will also elevate the visibility and respect for our entire specialty.

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