WELCOME SPEECH

FOR

SASHPAL SANDHU

Years ago, it was said, “Tooth decay was a perennial national problem that meant a mouthful of silver for patients, and for dentists a pocketful of gold.” **That was then, and this is now.** Hello everyone, I am Dr. Sashpal Sandhu and I would like to welcome you tonight on our “maiden voyage” of our new association, (**Name the association**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, dedicated to support and sharing to strengthen our profession and practices. We have all chosen a noble medical career, and like all professional enterprises, today’s economic and physical climate present unprecedented challenges to our practices, patients and communities. It is said there is strength in numbers and today is the first day we all stand together, strengthened in support as a group. Although we are all individuals with substantial practices who have earned esteem and distinction in our respective communities, we are creating the context, right here and right now, to form an even stronger professional community to serve ourselves, our employees, and ultimately our surrounding neighbors. The purpose of forming this association is to make us even better and more efficient as we serve our clients and contribute to the health and well being of our neighbors.

As I think of the profession of dentistry, I think of the passion and care I bring to my clients and my work. I know how important it is to come from a place of health and well-being and I believe in preventative medicine, research and instituting proper methods of advanced care in order to minimize the probable negative effects of neglect and ignorance. There is no reason why we cannot apply the same concepts to our entire profession, and that is why we’re here tonight. I know I have experienced many instances where I am baffled at how to handle issues concerning a patient, a lab, a new technology, or insurance administration. I try to think of how I might solve certain issues or how I may more successfully prepare myself for changes in procedures that are imminent. Sometimes I read articles or white papers on new innovations and I want to share them with my colleagues. Sometimes I come across a medical issue with a client and I need some advice. Sometimes my schedule is just too loaded and I feel that although I wish I would be able to clone myself, science is just not there yet. There’s news, conventions, information out there and it passes us by if we don’t participate. There are also times I meet with fellow dentists to discuss some or all of these scenarios. It was a natural extension of this thought process and exploration to create a context in which we might all come together and share our successes as well as our challenges to strengthen our practices and ultimately our profession. We all have the opportunity to participate in national or international dental conventions or symposiums, and that’s great, but time and technology are both moving very quickly in this day and age and to be able to have the support of those who are “in the trenches with us” is, I believe, even more valuable to our success and longevity in this profession.

I’m sure most of us remember Johnny Carson, the late night talk show host. He had a great sense of humor and an even better staff of writers. He once made the comment, “Happiness is your dentist telling you it won't hurt and then having him catch his hand in the drill.” Yes. Dentists sometimes get a bad rap. Lots of people are even afraid to got to the dentist! I know it’s hard to believe, given how nice and sincere and dedicated we all are, but if people are too scared to find out how nice we are, how are they going to experience oral health? As part of a dental association, we can work collectively to promote a positive image of dentistry to entice more people to participate in their own dental hygiene and awareness. People fear the unknown and through our mutual association, we can explore different means of community outreach to gain increased acceptance by potential clients who would have, in the past, pretended they didn’t need to see a dentist.

Modern technology affects dentistry on several levels and in order to maintain a viable, modern, responsive and productive practice, all of us have to be informed of all of the latest information and innovations. Whether in the area of equipment and technology, new practices and treatments, office administration and record keeping, risk assessment, or any other area one can possibly think of, by the time we address the issue, there will be new techniques and trends to learn. All of this is rather daunting when one thinks of oneself as an individual dealing with the bigger “machine.” Remember that as a group, there is strength in numbers.

As an example of the power of unity, let’s take a look at the California Dental Association. This serves as a good blueprint for what we are in the process of establishing. The CDA was founded in San Francisco in 1870, has morphed and adapted to the times and is now located in Sacramento and encourages membership for dentists throughout the state. Their website provides a mission statement, valuable information for every facet of the profession and although there is a link to the American Dental Association, it is important to remember, as the website states, that by being a part of a more localized or familiar group, you would have representation at a local level, not only a state (or provincial) or national level afforded to you with membership in the Canadian Dental Association. Also, let’s keep in mind that if one of us has a cause or an issue to discuss with the Canadian Dental Association, each of our voices will be that much stronger as the voice of a group as opposed to that of an individual. The one thing I do have to acknowledge about the website for the Canadian Dental Association is the bridge they offer to social media. Having a presence on websites such as Facebook and Twitter affords us the opportunity to communicate with our clients, vendors and community in new and unprecedented ways. Some of you may find the prospect of expanding your dental “brand” daunting, but as part of our new association, you will have guidance, support and details on how to most effectively navigate this new frontier-which by the way, isn’t so new. Now more than ever, we must step up and be a part of the new world we live in. That is not to say that most if not all of you currently participate in managing an online presence. Through involvement with this association, your participation will be more effective.

On the membership page of the California Dental Association, we are greeted with the headline, “Progress. It’s what happens when 25,000 dentists work together.” I have to say that it’s also what happens when 25 or 50 dentists work together! Imagine the impact we can have!! Think of the areas of your practice that need improvement. Think about the areas you are proud of. I’ll bet that in this room, there is a balance on each side of this scale, and through the connections formed by this group, issues get solved, problems get addressed and handled, and outstanding performance gets acknowledged and encouraged. Think of the number of patients in your roster. Now think of the number of ACTIVE patients you have. Think of all of the people in your community that haven’t been to the dentist for years. It’s almost impossible to imagine the clientele you are NOT reaching, but they’re out there. Through affiliation with this association, we will work to solve mysteries and challenges currently eroding our client base. Think about your staff. Are you providing an atmosphere that encourages optimal performance? Are there new technologies you have not yet embraced? Is your staff trained to handle all facets of administration effectively and accurately? If you need to hire new staff, do you have the most effective tools to reach the talent pool? And what about insurance issues? Don’t forget, there’s not only patient insurance issues to deal with-for the patients fortunate enough to still have dental insurance, how about your own personal liability or malpractice insurance, or your equipment insurance? Are you sure you have the best coverage available for the price you can afford to pay?

I want to emphasize a critical area that needs to be addressed. I just made a statement mentioning patients that still have dental insurance. I also asked if you thought you had the best insurance that you can **AFFORD**. Let’s not kid ourselves. These are tough times economically. Even if one’s practice is thriving, there are issues and expenses that chip away at the bottom line. Years ago, being in a medical profession meant prosperity. That is no longer the case for many of us. We have to constantly devise ways of meeting our financial responsibilities and overhead even though constant increases from vendors, support services, insurance premiums and basic supplies keep adding to our bottom line. And that’s from our side! Also chipping away at our bottom line is the inevitable attrition we all experience as our clients lose jobs, forfeit salary increases, or lose insurance benefits. There are many people out there who in the past had regular cleanings each year. They had their teeth whitened, they felt a little flush and went for the extra veneers, they switched their old silver fillings for porcelain or new materials. Like I said earlier, **that was then and this is now.** People don’t have “disposable” income like they used to, and it’s a pity to even imagine that one might even consider taking care of one’s dental health as “disposable,” but ladies and gentlemen, to many people who are or used to be our clients, they may have to consider taking care of their teeth as non-essential. They’ll brush longer and harder. They’ll floss more. They’ll pretend that “tingle” they just felt wasn’t the beginning of a cavity. They simply cannot afford to see a dentist as regularly as they might have in the past. **That was then, and this is now**. Together, the members of this association will address this type of issue and work together to find equitable resolutions.

So how do we deal with this? The benefits of an organized association devoted to the advancement of our dental practices are immeasurable and inestimable. What lies before us is a very exciting road and I am thrilled to have distinguished colleagues such as each one of you to share this journey with me. I have to say, this is new to me too, but I know with the encouragement and support of people like **YOU**, we can build a successful organization.

Since the earliest days of recorded history, the concept of a “guild” or a confraternity of craftsmen-glassworkers, masons, carpenters and other skilled workers, formed associations. During the Gupta period in India, around AD 300-600, there were “shreni,” or craftsmen’s associations. In ancient Rome, there were “collegia” for the same purpose. The ancient Greeks had similar guilds and the concept stretched all the way to China as well. Apparently, it is inherent in human nature for people with common bonds to unite to forge strength and unity and to maximize their individual and collective impact within society. Now it’s our turn. We have some wonderful examples to inspire us to newer and more effective means of communication, action and impact. There has been no time like right now to implement the strategies that will serve us as individuals and as a medical professional community. I urge all of you to consider how your practices are doing and what you- **AND WE** can do to support success for all of us. There is no time like the present to plan for the future and there is no time like right now to form and join this essential association. I am thrilled to share this idea with all of you and I look forward to standing with all of you as one united group of fine dentists as we revolutionize and EVOLUTIONIZE the way we all do business and serve our clients and communities. This is **YOUR** organization and we will do whatever we can to address the issues and concerns that face each one of us every day.

Thank you all for your support and may we all meet again next year and look back on the impact and progress we made as a viable and cohesive unit!

Remember, **THAT WAS THEN AND THIS IS NOW!** Thank you!