

On Manufactured Dental Conditions

Much will be written and published this year to celebrate Charles Darwin's 200th birthday. He is, after all, widely regarded as the most important thinker the human species has produced. This conviction is expressed by numerous eminent scientists, including Richard Dawkins, the brilliant author of *The Selfish Gene* in 1976 and *The God Delusion* in 2007. Dawkins recently observed that Darwin's great idea has moved on and asserts that if the latter were to return to see 21st century evolutionary science, it would enthrall and amaze him. But he would also not recognize it as his own, since modern scientists are coloring amazing and exciting details onto Darwin's magnificent canvas. The impact of evolution by natural selection, as first published in 1859, catalyzed fascinating scientific theories and discoveries ever since. It ushered in, above all, an extraordinary appreciation for the fact that, in Dawkins' words, "life coaxes and stretches the laws of physics and chemistry to evolve prodigious feats of complexity, diversity and beauty."

All of this is pretty cerebral scientific stuff and perhaps even a far cry from routine clinical prosthodontic endeavors. However, the process of objective, naturalistic observations and disciplined analyses that underscored Darwin's *modus operandi* is exercised daily and often intuitively by clinical scientists. They separately and collectively ensure that yesteryear's conceptual molds are broken and reassembled in response to critical thinking and revised mindsets. This has certainly been the scientific trajectory of osseointegration, since its inherent versatility potential has been explored and expanded by both clinical and academic colleagues. The results have been most impressive, with an increased focus on the essential nature of the induced healing response to the surgical intervention. As a result, the scope and range of the technique's applications continue to challenge even the most diehard traditional prosthodontic and periodontic approaches to retaining or replacing depleted and entire dentitions together with their associated areas of support.

This exciting therapeutic breakthrough would suggest a new treatment era of applied dental scientific advances that preclude tenacious anecdotal baggage. This does not appear to be the case, however, given persistent diagnoses of "TMJ clicks" or so-called "black triangles." There are some in the profession who still

regard these clinical nuisance examples as ominous conditions and insist that they must be treated and far too often, treated invasively. A more recent example of a relatively inconsequential finding that suggests yet one more manufactured disease is peri-implantitis. As a clinical teacher, who together with numerous colleagues from around the world sought to advance the scope of the osseointegration technique (particularly for prosthodontically challenged patients), this inflated and indiscriminate emphasis on diverse and frequently benign inflammatory tissue responses around some implants is alarming. Underscoring the extraordinary biological differences between surgically induced interfacial osteogenesis (osseointegration) and biologically evolved retention of teeth in their bony sockets should be the starting point in understanding differences in the pathogenesis of tooth loss or biologic implant failure. There are admitted gaps in our current picture of the control of the healing response in osseointegration; but the missing pieces cannot be selected or colored indiscriminately, lest we lose sight of the even bigger patient picture. Good dentistry cannot simply be reduced to tidy formulas or rigidly ordered credos. It demands scrupulous observational skills to compensate for the absence of hard scientific evidence, which either justifies or negates what could be unnecessary and misguided interventions.

I invited three highly respected scientists—Tomas Albrektsson, John Brunski, and Ann Wennerberg—to offer their thoughts on this topic. Their commentary makes for a very provocative read. This issue also includes the winning abstracts from the poster competition at last autumn's Scientific Meeting of the Italian Academy of Prosthetic Dentistry. The abstracts were vetted by the Academy's Scientific Committee and organized for the IJP by Dr Stefano Gracis, who is one of our reviewers.

In last issue's editorial, I thanked specific reviewers for their past services to the IJP. I inadvertently left out the name of my old friend Jörg Strub from Freiberg, Germany and hasten to offer him my apologies and especially the journal's sincere thanks for his invaluable help.

George A. Zarb
Editor-in-Chief

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