

Passing the torch to Robert J. Isaacson

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With the beginning of the year 2000, good things are happening for the *Angle Orthodontist*. As announced in the last issue, Robert J. Isaacson will be taking over as editor. In my most recent editorial two months ago I asked you to look back at over 10 years of published papers, editorials, and case reports and ask a simple question, "Did they make any difference?" Now I want you to focus on the future of this journal and a different set of challenges for our new editor.

Dr. Isaacson has prepared in every way possible to assume the position of editor. He has an extensive background in education, having served as the professor and chairman of three orthodontic departments—Minnesota, California, and Virginia. Research opportunities followed at each of these schools, resulting in a large number of professional publications as well as scientific presentations throughout the world. At the age of 33, Dr. Isaacson was the youngest full professor at the University of Minnesota, and he went on from there to prove his worth as a writer, an educator, and clinician. It is clear to one and all that Bob Isaacson has a curriculum vitae that anyone would be proud of. But what plans does he have for the *Angle Orthodontist*?

When asked about his vision and goals regarding the dissemination of scientific information, Isaacson stated, "Historically, the passage of

scientific information evolved from word of mouth communication to handwritten documents. Gutenberg's movable type and the printing press revolutionized the process and the printing press has been the cornerstone of information management for several hundred years." But, he continued, "Since the industrial revolution, science has progressed at an ever-accelerating pace and 90% of the scientists who ever lived are alive today. This acceleration has led to increasing amounts of new information that, in turn, has resulted in increased numbers and sizes of journals. This growth taxes our communication systems and long delays often occur between the development and the dissemination of information."

"The recent and rapid development of digital information has positioned us on the threshold of a major paradigm shift. Scientific journals are facing a revolution in information processing. Some are now questioning whether the scientific journal and the research library will continue to exist, as we know them."

According to Isaacson, "These changes affect both the consumers and the publishers of scientific journals. Publishers face increasing costs, and esoteric journals have a limited ability to expand circulation. Subscription prices are rising faster than traditional libraries can afford. Journals are experimenting with ways to integrate their mis-

sion with the information age using the digital worldwide web. In many physical sciences, electronic print has become the primary means of communication. Declan Butler described and documented these trends in an excellent recent article, *The Writing is on the Web* (Nature 1999;397:195-200)."

With this exciting background on the future of this journal, Isaacson asks, "Where do we go from here? The trend suggested by Declan Butler will be for the smaller, more esoteric publications, with finite distribution potentials, to become paperless and electronic. Many others will develop some combination of paper and digital publication. The driving force appears to be primarily economic rather than scientific."

Isaacson's concluding statements hit at the heart of his plans for the future of this esteemed journal. "The *Angle Orthodontist* is in the information business. Very fundamental changes are occurring and a leading journal must look hard at the fundamental way it transmits information. Of course, we must continue to keep focused on quality, reader acceptance, and all of the normal details of day-to-day business. However, today's needs go way beyond cosmetic changes in format or cover design. It is an exciting time because we are inescapably part of what may prove to be the most profound changes of the recorded word."

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