

Letter from the Future

2023-2028

My friends,

Many extraordinary things have happened since I last wrote. The world changed around us. But as it changed, so did we. Thanks to careful foresight and planning, we adapted to the new circumstances, ending up stronger than ever. Years ago, we dared to ask a simple question: What would it take to transform ICD-USA from a good into a great organization? There are those who stress superlatives: oldest, biggest, most prestigious. We realized that while nice to say, these terms held no inherent meaning to who we truly were. We made the choice to make this organization something more concrete: the honorary organization that our colleagues *wanted* to join and remain a part of. Let's look back and see how that happened.

Our Fellows have always been the reason we exist. Because of their importance, our members' opinions of how we are doing have been critical to our socially and professionally inclusive success. Regular surveys of our perceived value amongst the membership have helped our college evolve. Listening and communicating with our members achieved a significant improvement in recruitment and retention. Our relationships with other national organizations allowed us to engage our Fellows, expand our leadership and service resources, and increase our membership base.

The success of the past few years has been due in large part to our ability to share our message. As we arrive in 2028, the ICD recognizes the importance of communication. We have achieved our goal to create a connected network that allows dental professionals from around the world to collaborate easily. We use advanced technologies and online platforms to facilitate real-time communication, knowledge-sharing, and learning. Through virtual conferences, webinars, and online forums, we work together with dentists from different locations to exchange ideas and grow together. By embracing new communication tools, we foster a stronger global community, encourage service and leadership, and improve oral health worldwide.

Part of our Mission states that we recognize and promote excellence in leadership. We have done this for many years for students at each of our dental schools. It is always a great source of pride to see a student award winner become a Fellow, an indication that we chose well. We have made recognizing leadership part of our Mission, for one does not become a Fellow of ICD without demonstrating a strong ability to be a leader. We are proud that many of our leaders come from such diverse backgrounds. We recognized that leadership skills are perishable, so we encouraged our Fellows to read books and articles from our suggested reading lists and we also posted some online resources to hone their skills. We provided training to those members who wanted to get involved in the decision-making of the Section. We encouraged our chapters to get involved in leadership activities at the state level.

“Serving Others” distills who we are in two simple words. Great leaders serve their members. Volunteerism is that aspect of our organization where we serve the oral health needs of the world. ICD does this through direct action of our Fellows. Our seasoned members mentor those who have yet to volunteer; they teach them the intricacies of how to join an existing volunteer trip or even how to start a new one. We have successfully partnered with Special Olympics and many of those athletes found dental homes with ICD Fellows. We also have several outreach programs to assist veterans with finding care that they otherwise could not afford. Operation Stand Down and Everyone 4 Veterans has engaged many of our Fellows in volunteerism. We also did not forget the students. The Bettie R. McKaig Student Experience continues to be one of our most popular programs as we spread the idea of Serving Others to the next generation of our colleagues. In an effort to increase knowledge of our mission, Leadership and Humanitarian awards are given to two students from each dental college every year. We also sponsor many of the dental schools’ White Coat Ceremonies annually.

The final piece that got us to where we are today is our financial health. Dues-based organizations have and continue to struggle to maintain a solid financial portfolio for sustainability. We overcame this by focusing on our mission when we made decisions about what activities we would support. Additionally, we affiliated with like-minded organizations, received financial support from outside vendors, and revised our financial policies so that we were able to increase our reserves to over \$1 million. This took discipline and commitment, but we now enjoy financial security that will serve us well into the future.

When we started this project, the path to greatness, we understood that there were five areas we needed to focus on: membership, communications, leadership, service, and finances. By working together and keeping that focus sharp, we did what we set out to do: we made the USA Section a sustainable organization worthy of its vision. It is unlikely that Dr. Ottofy or Dr. Okumura understood what ICD would become. I believe they would be astonished at what it has accomplished. My dream is that I would be astonished in 100 years at how much further it has evolved.