

President's Report

This presidential year has been a very busy one.

From a personal point of view it has taken enormous amount of time and energy for me to carry out the duties expected of me both on the National and International stage and I trust that I have carried these Ambassadorial responsibilities with care and continual concern about AOA and all that its reputation requires.

The 'pro-bono president' era is I believe, slowly drawing to a close. To responsibly and diligently undertake all the duties, and carry all the responsibilities required of a president takes an enormous amount of time and this time is at the expense of all other areas of life.

I would first like to pay tribute to my very beautiful and patient wife who has accompanied and supported me in almost every part of my presidential process and has been the most amazing ambassador that AOA could ever expect a president to have by his side.

She has been a faithful supporter of my presidential role and a faithful supporter of AOA and all that is sound in orthopaedics and all that relates to prudence and graciousness in the national and international arena.

AOA needs to be an organisation committed to detail.

For the first time this year I saw a financial report presented to AOA Board and an auditors report presented with it that are clear and showed an absolute commitment to detail by all those involved in producing it. My sincere thanks go to Graham Mercer our Honary Treasurer and Jeff Clarke our CPA who have, with the CEO Ian Burgess been committed to the detail of making our financial affairs consistent with reasonable financial management practice.

AOA needs commitment to communication.

Another lesson we need to learn and it will surely keep AOA with its good reputation is that of commitment to communication.

Our reputation will begin in the training arena where we communicate to medical students initially, residents at a later stage, pre trainees in a further stage and, most of all, to our trainees throughout their training programme and beyond.

Our clear communication whatever the medium, will play a defining and very important role in selection, training and maintaining competence in the Orthopaedic community in the long term.

Communication to facilitate excellence in continuing professional development at every level in every state at National and International level cannot be overstressed.

AOA needs commitment to science based medicine/surgery.

AOA needs a serious commitment to science in orthopaedics and that must mean we use evidence based surgery rather than marketing based direction or inducement. A commitment to science by AOA will give it a continuing but high reputation and lasting credibility.

Our scientific rigour will be marred by conflicts of interest and inducement accusation and for that reason we must be careful with disclosure, with disclaimer and with declaration of any conflict of interest in any part of our scientific process. AOA through its officers must be 'clean' and 'seen to be clean'.

Any involvement by any person in any meeting or teaching program by any party either AOA or outside AOA must demand presentation of a declaration or disclaimer with respect to their science, their subject, their paper or their publication.

For AOA to maintain a good reputation, continuing professional development means commitment to continuing education. We have seen this gradually improving over the last year and we continue to trust that it will over the years to come. IT services expansion will surely make this a much larger arena for learning and changes in delivery mode will undoubtedly arise in coming years.

AOA needs commitment to Robust Training and Fellowships.

AOA needs to look at all overseas training programmes in the English speaking world and see what sort of comparability exists. This needs to be done in an objective way and we have already made plans to begin evaluation of this in Hobart 2008 with respect to some.

Accreditation of training programme posts and accreditation of Fellowship posts must be seen as essential. Overseas observers cannot believe that some fellowship posts have arisen without any accreditation process or assessment.

International interest in the English speaking world for Fellowships accreditation has also been very positive and this may make it more reasonable for fellowships to be funded through an AOA fellowships fund, independent of direct industry support. There is no doubt that training Fellows is a very useful investment in the future but time by consultants training those Fellows has to be quarantined. It is impossible for any consultants to train a registrar and a Fellow at the same time. AOA does not want registrar training to be any less effective because of the presence of a Fellow or vice versa. This needs to be addressed carefully.

AOA needs to be known by its good reputation.

With Training and Fellowship programmes falling into disrepute around the world, there are many lessons we can learn by listening to those who have seen the problems in their own country. AOA needs to lead the way in this arena. Industry is still reeling from inappropriate activities and I believe will not be a serious player in fellowship support ever again. We need to begin a fellowships fund for support of trainees that want to take their education further and in a responsible way. 'AOA Accredited fellowships' is a natural path to follow. AOA reputation will give foundation to the training in these positions if they fulfil all that we desire them to for accreditation.

AOA needs commitment to safety in orthopaedic assessment of IMGs.

AOA sees the present immigration situation has brought to light some problems assessing international training or overseas training and this needs to be addressed carefully also. That government is placing overseas practitioners in area of need situations without proper assessment or supervision is unbelievably corrupt. With the College pathways now available and well structured AOA must play a vital role in making sure immigration assessment for practise in this country is strict and objective and above all allows only safe practitioners to practice in this country.

AOA needs commitment to support orthopaedic outreach.

AOA supports orthopaedic surgeons especially in outreach situations where Australian practitioners who are eager to reach out to overseas and third world countries may do so with safety and be well informed in all aspects of that practise. Our own country would benefit from orthopaedic support for indigenous peoples also.

AOA needs commitment to deal with the dysfunctional practitioner.

Dealing with dysfunctional practitioners has become a major problem. Unfortunately this often relates to what I refer to as 'referee crime'. The referees for a certain practitioner are carefully chosen and may or may not be real or imaginary. One practitioner well known to AOA is now registered as a consultant Orthopaedic surgeon in the UK a courtesy to the GMC process. This was obviously grossly flawed as the practitioner failed the part II examination in Australia several times and created some major worries here before 'silently' leaving for overseas to be registered and practise in the UK. Medical boards in Australia are often less than helpful in assisting AOA in dealing with competence issues. AOA needs to remain active in reporting competence issues and making sure the boards act on the information given.

AOA should learn lessons from other Associations.

I need to take a little time to explain to the Board some lessons that we need to learn from other Associations if our Association is to maintain a reputation in the international community.

Presidential Travel is mandatory:

AOA must be represented if we are to maintain credibility and travel planning for the Presidential line is vitally important if we are to maintain useful contact with our overseas colleagues and maintain cordial interaction between the associations. AOA's strategic plan has determined that we will expand our Asia Pacific relationship and I have worked hard to make that a reality.

Planning the Presidential year.

Any year plan and travel plan for the Presidential line however is not simple. The plans for 2008 have taken an enormous amount of my time. Appointing a travel agent only introduces another dimension of concern although it does take some of the load from central office staff.

All the arrangements and transport as well as transfers are best left in the travellers' hands. I have felt pressure from the Board to minimise costs and have worked hard

in order to do so. This has brought an enormous expansion in time to reach destinations and often serious inconvenience for the travellers. There is a high physical stress component to 'cost saving' that has been a serious concern to me.

Choosing a round the world ticket however on several occasions this year has made a substantial difference in cost but put a substantial strain on the travellers despite the fact we travelled business class on most of those sectors.

Planning to do 'mainly business and occasionally economy' overseas creates major problems with luggage and often compromises baggage delivery at the destination. Travel costs should aim to preserve the traveller and preserve AOA.

The Japanese Orthopaedic Association taught me a very useful lesson by confirming that all our hotel accommodation would be paid for by their Association and that transfers to and from the airport were to be funded by them also. They were so organised, in fact, that in a very clear document with Japanese script and vouchers for several long transfer distances, the cost was fully covered by the Japanese Association. The transfers and the accommodation were superb. This allows daily living costs to be set at a minimum and sets aside a little that can be used for gifts to honour those who invite the AOA President to their meeting.

I must say that Asia Pacific associations make visitors most welcome and do so in a warm and hospitable way despite major language difficulties. It has been my policy to be a wise ambassador who can affirm the reputation of the AOA and report back to AOA the usefulness of the trip. It is important to make the most of each trip and indeed understand that the purpose of your trip is to build a relationship between Associations that improves with time.

I will continue to work on Asia Pacific contacts and communication even after my Presidential year has ceased.

Data Base for Overseas Associations.

There is no doubt that personal contacts with overseas colleagues and with overseas offices can create potential interactions that confirm that a relationship is strong and well.

Gifts received from overseas institutions have confirmed that our gifts are an important part of our diplomacy and sincere thanks for real hospitality. If there are potential conflicts between associations or between practitioners in various associations much of this can be dealt with between Presidents who almost always communicate quickly and well.

I cannot understate the importance of maintaining personal contact and head office contact with overseas groups and Associations.

State Meeting Plans need early invitation and careful planning.

I cannot understate the importance of maintaining state contacts and dates at head office. If you state wishes to invite the president to your state meeting do so early in the year and not the week before. Remember he cannot be in two places at once. I have been disappointed by a 'week before' invitation which came with an 'apology' via head office. This communication does not support the good reputation of AOA and really simply reflects very poor manners toward or a personal animosity of AOA

senior officers by those who are officers of AOA and this does much to tarnish our reputation.

Regional Meetings and support.

I was pleased to attend meetings in several regional areas and it was an uplifting time in every way. Hospitality, encouragement and good old friendliness was always there. Wives even noted that they were encouraged that Harriet had attended to support me and indeed them in their regional support duties for their orthopaedic partners. We should note that it is not always as easy in the country and I indeed saw that on several trips.

The importance of 'Saying Thanks'.

We cannot under estimate the importance of saying 'thanks'. This should always be undertaken in as many ways as possible at the meeting and after one returns to home base. We must be prepared to take gifts with us on every trip and be careful to know what is prudent and what is not in their choice.

This is probably the most important part of making the most of the trip. Future requests that speakers attend AOA scientific meetings is also a way to say thanks for all the hospitality have received and science you have learned whilst overseas.

In doing all of this I also believe that I as President, should pass on to the first vice-president the importance of much of this so that he will understand how to deal with the problems he might face but maintain corporate knowledge in every facet of his presidential year.

I cannot understate the importance of the president's wife undertaking travel with him. This is recognised as a standard protocol for Asia Pacific as well as for English speaking meetings. It is important also for each presidential wife to pass on the patterns of the presidential process and particularly the importance of hospitality in Australia and planning for annual scientific meetings here at home.

I trust that my year as President will have made clear to every overseas association that I have visited that AOA has a very good reputation from a hospitality point of view and in every training and education process

The President must be funded to do this and cannot be expected to fund it himself. More than a quarter of his year is spent away from his practice. Secretarial duties take twenty to forty hours per week depending upon time of year. They do not stop when one is overseas. Personal life is on 'hold' for that year. Despite all this I believe that these are investments for the future, not for the practitioner who travels because that is very hard work and certainly not a holiday on any way shape or form. The Presidential traveller and his wife set aside time from their practice and home responsibilities and as such, sustain a substantial loss of earnings in giving up the time to commit themselves to AOA ambassadorial activities.

I believe this should always be the prime role of the AOA President and without question his funding and support should be given by the Board in such a way that he

does not feel embarrassed or concerned about what the Board might think as a consequence of undertaking full AOA duties

I believe I have maintained AOA's good reputation in every way.
Thank you for giving me the honour and privilege in being the President of AOA.