The History of Southern Endodontic Study Group

Dr. William Powell, Past SESG Chair (1981) and SESG member since 1972, presented this historical information at the 2016 SESG Meeting in honor of the 60th meeting of the Southern Endodontic Study Group. We thank him for his research and time spent working on this presentation.

To discuss the history of the Southern Endodontic Study Group (SESG), we need to look at the history of Endodontics itself. Findings in the archeological digs of ancient cultures demonstrated an attempt to place items in the canal space of teeth. In the Missouri Dental Journal in late 1800's there was a report of placing molasses and bird droppings in canals. The molasses probably did nothing but provide an ease of placement, but the bird droppings had enough ammonia to help kill off some Lactobacillis.

The American Association of Endodontists (AAE) was founded in 1943 after many years of meeting during Chicago Mid-Winter Meeting. Early AAE meetings continued in Chicago at that time and it was incorporated in 1956 and recognized as a dental specialty in 1963. The first American Board of Endodontics was given 1964. The first oral examination was given in Memphis, Tennessee at the office of Dr. Milton Siskin, father of our regular vendor, Greg Siskin of Ultimate/Endoco. The gentlemen selected to be examiners examined each other. They all passed.

Now to the SESG History:

The genesis many have come from the First International Conference on Endodontics at the University of Pennsylvania in the Summer of 1953 directed by Dr. Louis Grossman. He had been exposed to Dr. Birger Nygaard-Ostby and other luminaries at a meeting the previous year in London. Dr. Ostby electrified the conference in Philadelphia with his study of the various endodontic procedures and evaluation of their success with sections of the root and surrounding tissue removed intact at various time sequences following treatment. His documentation of the biological basis for endodontic success removed all empirical concepts that had been projected historically. They were mainly disputing the "hollow tube" theory. Following this conference, discussion began about a southern contingent to bring the message to this region.

Dr. Jimmy Sherrard had been taught and mentored by Dr. Harry B. Johnson in Atlanta. Dr. Johnson was for years the only Endodontist in the world. His stationary in 1929 had "Limited Practice of Endodontia." He had been a faculty member at the Atlanta-Southern Dental School (later known as Emory School of Dentistry). Dr. Johnson was a close friend of Dr. Thomas Hinman, an oral surgeon, who endorsed Dr. Johnson's root canal treatment could prevent many extractions. Dr. Sherrard was taught, trained, and mentored by Dr. Johnson who later invited him to join him in the "Exclusive Practice of Endodontia" in 1946. Dr. Johnson guaranteed him $200.00 a month. The Navy was paying $216.00 a month, but he was willing to take the $16.00 pay cut. He got up to $300/month. Fees were: Anteriors - $25.00, Pre-molars - $35.00 Molars - $45.00

Dr. Sherrard attended his first AAE meeting in 1947 in Chicago. 47 people attended. Every year after that, several of the southern members traveled together and shared a suite while attending. During these "bull sessions" they shared their experiences of practice, technique tips, etc. So many of them scheduled for the same flight from Atlanta, they almost had a meeting on the plane.

In 1950 Dr. Sherrard got a referral from Tallahassee, Florida. He and Dr. Cam McDavid were the only endodontists in the southeast and Atlanta was easier to get to than Miami. The patient was a 12 year old boy who had a broken lateral incisor tooth from a baseball accident. He was a good patient, who watched the procedure with a hand mirror. So inspired by this, the young lad decided to go to dental school - Emory in Atlanta. Dr. Sherrard was teaching endodontics at Emory, and this young man come to him to remind him of their previous meeting. He went on to do more endodontic procedures in his senior year and then all of his classmates combined. After graduation, he joined the practice of Dr. Sherrard and worked with him until Dr. Sherrard retired. That young man was our own Dr. Jim Tate.

After the Philadelphia meeting, it was decided to have a meeting in conjunction with the Hinman Dental Meeting in Atlanta, with Dr. Nygaard-Ostby as the speaker. He had already been invited to speak to several organizations, schools, etc. This was convenient, as well as cost saving. Other southerners who were thought to be interested were invited. The organizational meeting was held at the 1956 AAE meeting in Chicago. Dr. Sherrard was elected Chairman. On Saturday, March 16, 1957, the first SESG Business Meeting was held in Dr. Sherrard's basement den. The travel exhausted Dr. Ostby, who slept the next room. Afterwards, a social hour and buffet in Dr. Sherrard's home was enjoyed.

The following day, the program was at the Atlanta Athletic Club. Three members presented case reports, and were followed by Dr. Nygaard-Ostby's presentation, "Clinical and Histological Investigation on New Agents for Cleansing and Enlarging Root Canals." The essence of his discussion was on open root apices of immature teeth repaired with the "Blood Clot" technique suggested by Dr. Ostby induced by gently inoculation the apical tissue through the root canal of the affected tooth. The clot became the nucleus for the regeneration process which continued for ensuing months. Is it not ironic that nearly 60 years later we are still discussing this topic?

Open discussions followed and sharing of experiences and techniques on routine cases ensued. This session was so enjoyable; it was decided to have it annually.

The founding members were:

Dr. Luther Butler, Greensboro, N.C.
Dr. Walter T. Colquitt, Shreveport, LA
Dr. Jacob Freedland, Charlotte, N.C
Dr. Don Gerdes, Ashville, NC
Dr. Julian Kelly, Atlanta, GA
Dr. Cam McDavid, Miami, FL
Dr. Jessie Mitchell, Jacksonville, FL

Dr. Charles Scott, Chattanooga, TN
Dr. James Sherrard, Atlanta, GA
Dr. Adeeb Thomas, Birmingham, AL
Dr. Ben Wilkerson, Miami, FL
Dr. Jack Landsberg, South Florida was not a founder but was soon a member and hard worker.

The dues were set at $25.00 per year, which included the cost of the annual banquet. It was suspected that the surplus would be used to honorarium for guest speaker, who had been promised no more than a 1st class bus ticket, a good meal, and an abundance of hospitality. These gentlemen were GPs who did endodontic treatment. Only a few did it exclusively.

After another year in Atlanta, associated with the Hinman Meeting, it was decided to hold the meeting in different locations in the southeast. The time of the meeting was moved to the summer months, so that families could attend. If possible, an attempt was made to alternate the location between the beach and the mountains in the southeast. In 1971, the meeting site left the U.S. for the first time to meet in the Grand Bahamas. This happened again in 1995 going to Bermuda, in 2010 in Puerto Rico, and in 2014 the Bahamas again. In 2000, we left the southeast region to meet in Colorado, in 2003 in San Antonio, Texas, and in 2008 in New Mexico. Many of our locations in the southeast have been repeated. This year is the fifth time in Williamsburg, Virginia.

The geographic boundaries that were originally set were challenged when it was realized that several worthy members who were interested were close by, but beyond the original states. Dr. Maury Friedman from Little Rock, Arkansas and Dr. Bill Hicks from Evansville, Indiana joined. Later, Dr. Glen Walters from San Antonio, Texas soon joined. Later the geographic boundaries were relaxed, and we have been blessed by members from many different states outside the southeast. For years a rule existed that if a member missed three consecutive meetings, their membership was terminated. That rule no longer exists.

Members of the SESG have always been hard workers in this group as well as all organized dentistry. Until recently, before hiring an Executive Secretary, the organizational work and the annual meeting was done by members, families, and office. The historical images we enjoy each year was started by Dr. Charlie Scott and continued by Dr. Glenn Walters.

Our programs have always been interesting and excellent. Many speakers have been so popular that they have presented several times. This year's speaker, Dr. Ken Hargraves, is speaking for the third time. Following a tradition started at the very first meeting, members have made presentations. In fact, it was considered at one time an initiation requirement. We have gotten away from that because of the number of new members each year. Some years, our members have been either the featured speaker or have done case reports or been on a panel discussion.

SESG Members have served in many positions and offices. Six past chairs have served as AAE Presidents, one as AAE Secretary, one as ADA President, one as ADA Vice-President, and two as ADA Trustees. Many others have served as AAE Directors, on AAE Committees, American

Board of Endodontics, ADA Councils and Commissions, and as state and local dental association presidents.

Our heritage is proud, and our future is bright. Our comrade and fellowship is priceless. We are blessed. Keep up the great work and BE WELL.