My name is Jimmy Wilson, and I am one of your candidates for the position of secretary/treasurer of the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP). Like many of you, I am a full-time private practitioner, having been in practice since 1998. Since that time, I have served in leadership roles in local, state, and national organizations including past president of the Florida Association of Periodontists, as well as a two-term AAP Board of Trustees member. These experiences have provided me insights into the challenges and concerns that our specialty faces and some of the possible solutions.

**Breaking barriers, building a better future for the AAP**

Leadership is about solving problems. It is an action, not a position. During my six years on the Board, I have earned the respect of my fellow Trustees, AAP officers, and staff by standing up for what I believe and developing consensus to produce results. One of my strengths is the ability to discount minutiae and observe from a higher level to focus on change that is strategic and forward thinking. I am able to listen to counterpoints objectively, which helps me to analyze not only the positive, but also the negative impact of a decision and the anticipated response by others. I do not let this handcuff me, however, as I am a strong believer that it is better to create your future than to let others dictate it to you. These philosophical approaches have resulted in my selection to serve on the Executive Committee as a representative for the Trustees as well as the Strategic Planning Committee for three AAP president elects.

**Equal representation:** A leader of the AAP should not be satisfied with the status quo. For too long the perception of many members has been that a small group, furthering their own agendas, controlled our organization. I have acted as a member advocate during my years on the Board and plan to do so in the future. One of my proudest accomplishments was done in support of the everyday member. When members objected because they were not able to vote on the potential Academy name change unless they were present at the General Assembly, I was in complete agreement. It seemed unreasonable that dues-paying, voting members could not have their voices heard without traveling to the Annual Meeting where the General Assembly takes place. During the Board meeting immediately after this vote, I moved that the Board approve a task force with the purpose of making any future votes more inclusive. At the request of the president, I chaired that task force and its subsequent recommendations were ratified at the Annual Meeting in San Diego. Now and in the future, all voting members will be able to turn in a ballot for any future changes to the Academy’s Constitution and Bylaws.

**New paths for increased referrals:** As we deal with decreasing referrals from dentists, I feel the AAP is overlooking one of our biggest allies. I am in favor of the Academy creating a membership category for dental hygienists. I envision prospective hygienists needing to be sponsored by an AAP member to join. This will foster relationships between our members and the hygienists in their community. I would like to see the AAP develop study club materials for our members to use with these hygienists, which focus on how periodontists can assist in the care of mutual patients. A dedicated section of AAP Connect could be established, allowing hygienist members to interact with periodontists when they have questions about how to best manage their patients’ care. Finally, I would like to see a hygiene track at our Annual Meeting to better educate member hygienists, allowing the AAP to craft our message to them.

**Recognition of members’ implant expertise:** Starting at the 2014 Strategic Planning Committee meeting, I was one of a small group of Trustees and officers formulating and executing strategies aimed at recognizing the role dental implant therapy plays in our training and daily practices. Though I remain a strong believer that saving teeth with periodontal disease should be our goal, I feel a name change was an important start to providing this recognition.
Future strategies, whether the Academy adds implantology to its name or not, should focus on recognition of our expertise through some sort of fellowship or board certification. For those who felt a name change wouldn’t affect them one way or another, please consider that in medicine remuneration can be tied to credentialing. Many dental insurances already reimburse specialists at a higher level than generalists. As the lines of what defines a dental specialty become blurred, certification and fellowship credentials may affect your levels of reimbursement. Our members should not have to join another organization to reflect their expertise in both saving teeth and performing dental implant surgery.

Dental education: In many dental schools across the nation, students do not seem to graduate understanding the value of working with periodontists. Increasingly, schools use non-periodontists to teach students, have moved to a super generalist curriculum, or simply do not have periodontal departments in the traditional sense. This results in decreased or late referrals for traditional periodontal disease treatments. The AAP and the AAP Foundation must support our periodontal educators and must advertise the value of improved patient outcomes when working with a periodontal specialist.

Long term effect of corporate influence: After graduating from dental school and residency programs, many general dentists and new periodontists are faced with debt that prevents them from moving to a community to start a new practice, associate, or purchase an established practice. Our surveys have shown that traditional private practice remains the goal of new dentists and periodontists, however, economic realities influence their early-career decisions. This has allowed corporate entities to expand their brands. Many of these corporations perpetuate the super generalist model. Unfortunately, they also serve as the new training ground for young dentists who, even when they leave the corporations, have learned to practice with a super generalist mentality. Taking short courses on specialty procedures is seen as their way to improve the bottom line of their business, often at the expense of improved patient outcomes. This is not an issue facing periodontists only. The AAP must work with other specialty organizations to reach out to dentists and the public in recognizing the value of working with experts.

Setting the standards: I believe the future of periodontics is bright, but I understand that we must address trends that can marginalize our specialty. As periodontists, we need to promote that we are the experts in the diagnosis and treatment of periodontal diseases, improving smiles through periodontal plastic surgery, and that our training makes us the go-to providers for placing dental implants and managing their hard and soft tissue complications. The AAP, representing the experts in the science of periodontology, should set the standards of what appropriate periodontal therapy is and what constitutes acceptable therapeutic outcomes and patient health.

In June, you are going to be asked to help direct the future of our Academy as you vote for its officers. I ask for your vote in our upcoming election. With your support, I can promise that you will always have someone working on your behalf. I will devote myself to supporting periodontists and the future of our specialty. Thank you.

James G. Wilson, DMD
Diplomate, American Board of Periodontology

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