

# The World Federation of Associations of Pediatric Surgeons and the Future of Pediatric Surgery.

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The pillars on which Pediatric Surgery rests today and which have been responsible for the dramatic fall in mortality rates over the past forty years, were not constructed simultaneously, nor yet in many cases were they constructed specifically with the end of Pediatric Surgery in sight; rather they are the logical and chronological evidence of the advance in scientific understanding, in the whole field of medicine.

At points, which now with hindsight are clearly definable, specific problems have been encountered which, until clearly identified and effectively resolved, have held up the advance across an entire front. Once each of these specific problems has been overcome, the mortality statistics have been forced another major step down the descending stairway, in whose construction we are all involved.

As we contemplate this graphic stairway and consider the survival figures which are being achieved in some parts of the world, we could be tempted to believe that we are reaching the limits of realisable improvement. We might begin to make a comparison with the athlete who, only thirty to forty years ago, was able to chop seconds or even fractions of minutes from his performance records, where as his contemporary now has to inch forward, a painful hundredth of a second at a time. Are we then, like the athlete really at the point when major advances in our field of interest are not to be contemplated, when all progress must be made by merely fractional increments?

Let us attempt to discern the future of Pediatric Surgery, to define the paths forward and to identify the challenges which we shall be expected to meet and overcome.

Undoubtedly we should all agree that etiological

research must continue, that diagnostic and surgical techniques must continue to be refined and that we should strive towards a more complete understanding of those metabolic changes which result from surgical stress. All these surely, are among the valid aims for the future, but I would question if these lines of thought are the only way forward and if in fact it is possible to discern an equally important route which has perhaps to some degree been overlooked.

It is my belief that important as is the work of the individual surgeon in his operating theatre and the dedicated efforts of his team in each hospital, essential as are these individual efforts, they must be complemented at a wider and higher level if they are to prove as fruitful as they should. This fact was recognised by the creation of the various National Associations, to which we each belong and which have ably fulfilled the functions of spokesman of our concerns, provided a forum for the exchange of knowledge and a basis for the establishment of our common goals and objectives.

Thanks to the National Associations, it has proved possible to project our dreams and aspirations onto a bigger screen, to reach a wider audience and I think it is no exaggeration to state that as the influence of the National Association has grown and their worth been recognised by the authorities in our respective nations, more and more children's lives have been saved-lives which would not have been saved by the individual labour of the surgeons in their daily practice. The Associations complement the labour of the individual and serve as a catalyst to his aspirations.

In its turn, the International Federation was born in Sao Paulo in 1974, the dream child of those pioneers in our speciality, who had been witnesses to its value in the early days and had

watched over its steadily increasing contribution to the whole field of Pediatric Medicine. The birth of the International Federation was the forging of the final link in the chain composed of the individual surgeons, their teams, the National Associations and, finally, the Federation.

The Federation was created as a public manifestation of our individual dreams projected onto the world stage and its principal aim must be that of ensuring that every child in the world has access to effective pediatric surgery. A dream indeed today, an aim desperately hard to achieve, but I believe we are bound to attempt this task though the cooperation of pediatric surgeons throughout the world, knowing as we do, through bitter experience, that the task if left to governments will not be fulfilled.

This then is how I see the future of Pediatric Surgery, not only in a qualitative but in a quantitative dimension and this I believe is to be the role and value of the Federation, to which we belong.

Amongst the more obvious ways of fulfilling this aim, I could mention a number of tasks, which should know no frontiers or political limitations, and which must include the effective creation of opportunities for the international exchange and promotion of young surgeons; the classification and diffusion of information regarding available study grants and scholarships; the coordination of the presentation of our ideas and ideals to the supra-national bodies such as the World Health Organisation and UNICEF; the promotion and support of new National Associations; the constant defence of the innate right of every child to have access to suitable surgical services and the continuous campaign to bring these aims to the knowledge of a wider public. These are all tasks which though beyond our reach as individuals are yet well within the scope and possibility of an International Federation.

Let us for a moment consider however, to what extent we as individuals, are prepared to sacrifice our well-being, for the sake of the common interest. For, let there be no mistake about it, cooperation in this sense involves, for the majority of

us, giving without any hope of receiving anything tangible in return. Perhaps for some of us, may it not represent a return to that idealistic view of our profession which we held when first we were drawn into it and which we are sometimes tempted to forget?

Let us each be honest with ourselves today, are we in fact fighting for the world's children, or are the interests of those of our own nations, state or even hospital, those which are paramount in our minds? We are each called to a specific area of responsibility and that undoubtedly lies in the first instance with our neighbour, but let us not allow this fact to prevent us from raising our vision higher, to fight for the unknown child, who at present has no one to defend his rights.

It is not in our power to halt or reverse the obscene race towards ever more dreadful and more costly armaments in which so many of our governments seem inextricably involved; it is not in our power to modify materially the flow of wealth from the underdeveloped towards the industrialised world, nor yet to prevent the introduction of unsuitable and disproportionately expensive technology to the poorer nations of the earth. But the future of the globe is in the hands of its children and their wellbeing is at least in part in our hands. I believe it is our responsibility and our charge to offer them, within that area of activity which is ours and which we freely chose, the best future that our efforts and sacrifices can forge for them.

The bringing to reality of this dream lies, I believe, in greater and more effective cooperation between us and this can only be achieved through a strong and united Federation, aware of and agreed upon its aims.

I mentioned earlier that the Federation is the final link in a chain forget of the National Associations and ourselves. As a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so the Federation will be powerless to achieve its aims and to give substance to our dreams, without our individual support. The decision rests with each one of us, and the outcome depends only upon ourselves.