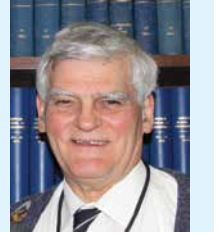


Epistemology, epistles and apostles

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A rather cursory search of the Web revealed that on offer during 2017 were some 25 major international Dental Conferences. The venues ranged from Philadelphia to Osaka, from Budapest to Auckland, Dublin to Madrid. The themes seemed mainly to be around Dental Care but there were some more focussed Congresses: Research, Polymere Science, Dental Marketing, Dental Education. The dedicated Congress attender would have his/her work cut out just to select which of this plethora of options should be included on his/her busy schedule!

This level of Congress activity speaks favourably of the profession from an epistemological point of view. The word epistemology nicely encompasses the essential rationale for organising congresses in the first place. Derived from the Greek *epistēmē* 'knowledge', from *epistasthai* 'know, know how to do', epistemology now implies the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion. Is that not the best of reasons to attend?

In the endeavour to ensure that there is indeed a transference of knowledge, Congress organizers normally invoke a variety of methods to deliver new understandings, be these through lectures, round table discussions, small group presentations (including practical experiences), and posters. Whatever the medium, Abernathy et al emphasized that the message should focus on the "Five C's" namely:

Clear: a message is easy to understand

Concise: a message is easy to read

Consistent: a message is related to information that is consistent with other existing information

Continuous: a message has follow-up to make sure it is not forgotten or overlooked

We could readily add another C, **Compelling:** a message should focus the attention of the audience.

A message requires a messenger, who must be seen as a credible expert on the information at hand. It is suggested that audiences respond to familiarity and their level of receptivity is enhanced if the messenger is someone who may be seen as being in a position similar to their own.² The World Bank describes key characteristics for an ideal messenger, patience, humility, flexibility and ability to listen. These might also be descriptive of an apostle, the messengers of various religions (Christianity, Islam, Latter Day Saints, Ahmadiyya, Ba Hai, among others) and there we find that the root of the word is *apostolos* (a messenger or ambassador) which derives from *apostellein*, to send forth. The apostle may depend on an epistle (*epistola*, Latin, a letter, from Greek, *epistole*, a message, letter, command, commission).

A successful Congress mixes apostles, epistles and epistemology to produce a time when receptive audiences absorb new knowledge, interact with the lecturers, debate amongst themselves the merits of the new knowledge and determine how they will transfer that knowledge into practical effect. That is the recipe for a successful Congress.

Oh yes, and just by the way, the Cape Town SADA 2017 Congress held at Centurion City made that mix and was hugely successful!! Glad you were there.

References

1. Abernathy T, Coutts J, Royce D, et al. Knowledge Transfer: Looking beyond Health 2000. Report on Conference Toronto, October 26.27, 2000.
2. Zarinpousch F, von Sychowski S, Speling J. Effective Knowledge Transfer. Imagine Canada, 2007.