

Interview with Dr. James E. Metz, Columbus Ohio

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The goal of the Dental Sleep Medicine Interest Group is to bring together dentists with an interest in sleep medicine and align them with the Assembly on Sleep and Respiratory Neurobiology.

By Cassandra Perez

The American Thoracic Society (ATS) Conference is a hub for pulmonary, critical care, and sleep professionals—and this year “sleep professionals” includes dentists. ATS will be in San Francisco from May 13-18, and on May 15, dentists would be wise to attend.

A component of the Sunday program is the “Dental Sleep Medicine Interest Group,” which will be held May 15 from 6 pm to 8:30 pm at the San Francisco Marriot Marquis. The goal of the interest group is to bring together dentists who have an interest in sleep medicine and align them with the Assembly on Sleep and Respiratory Neurobiology to discuss common interests that will benefit patients worldwide.

History

The Dental Sleep Medicine Interest Group was created to encourage cooperation in medicine and improve patient care, says chair James E. Metz, DDS. Metz explains that as one progresses in sleep medicine, the medical professional will likely observe that dentistry and medicine must work together as a unit. “The sleep dentist is an integral part of the medical team. The cooperation present at the American Thoracic Society is not available elsewhere. I believe their goal is true patient health...and that involves the dentist,” Metz says.

The first ATS Dental Sleep Medicine Interest Group meeting occurred last year at the 2015 ATS Conference, and it surpassed Metz's expectations—which encouraged him to hold the meeting again in 2016. The 2015 meeting was a “10 out of 10,” he says. “The warmth of our welcome by the Assembly on Sleep and Respiratory Neurobiology Assembly of the ATS leadership set the tone....I asked for and received a mentor, a world-class research pulmonologist, who helped me analyze data from a study we are conducting on mandibular advancement devices.”

Attendees will have a unique opportunity to not only collaborate but also show the medical community that they can play a key role in successful patient outcomes. Quoting Charles Mayo, co-founder of the Mayo Clinic, Metz says, “The next step in Preventive Medicine must be made by the dentists.” I believe this will prove to be true, if we take advantage of opportunity when it presents itself.”

Objectives

Metz says the goal of the interest group is to bring dentistry into medicine and medicine into dentistry. “The cultures of the two are very different. I feel that dentists are intimidated by physicians and pull away. The fact is that physicians need dentists to do what we do, because they cannot adequately fit or maintain oral appliances,” Metz explains. “Dentistry needs medicine to monitor the health and medications of the patient. The two professions working together is very powerful.”

The varied topics for the special meeting will include the role of the dentist in the sleep field and how to predict the response to oral appliance therapy. Additional topics include a general discussion, including planning for ATS 2017, as well as a talk titled “Does It Matter Which Oral Appliance We Choose?” that will address guidelines about oral appliance therapy use for sleep apnea treatment and the lack of large-scale research about the use of a single device.

According to Metz, the group has several objectives for the 2016 meeting, including further identifying research priorities and outcome studies in the area of oral appliances. Another objective is to collaboratively create opportunities for the dental community at the ATS conference.

An additional objective is to collaborate with the Assembly on Sleep and Respiratory Neurobiology in the development of joint statements that will benefit the sleep community. As obstructive sleep apnea is a medical condition and healthcare professionals must be responsible and concerned for a patient’s health, collaboration in medicine may improve outcomes, Metz explains. As such, he says working with the Assembly on Sleep and Respiratory Neurobiology is essential. “Working together allows for a better and more predictable outcome for the patient. Both medicine and dentistry have critical roles to fill to decrease the ravages of intermittent hypoxia (believed disease process associated with an obstructed airway) on the patient,” according to Metz.

A Bright Collaboration

Metz encourages dentists who are involved with sleep medicine to attend the interest group and to not miss the opportunity to show “physicians we really do care and are serious about our role.”...“The Dental Interest Group is the only true interaction with medicine at the highest level offered today. We have the attention of more than 17,000 chest physicians in the United States and more than 30,000 worldwide,” says Metz. “A dentist working with this group will make a difference and become integrated into the real world of sleep.”

In addition, Metz urges attendees of the special Sunday program—which, at \$150, includes full access to the ATS Conference on May 15—to attend the Assembly on Sleep and Respiratory Neurobiology meeting with assembly chair Susheel P. Patil, MD, PhD. According to the meeting’s agenda, the Assembly will focus on clinical and research questions associated with issues such as sleep, sleep apnea, and hypoventilation. Metz says, “[The meeting] will focus on the use of oral appliances for the treatment of obstructive sleep apnea. It will be a great day and the first time this has happened in the history of sleep medicine.”

Overall, attendees of the Dental Sleep Medicine Interest Group will have the unique opportunity to meet with dentists who have an interest in sleep medicine as well as other healthcare professionals to encourage and promote collaboration. “Dentists have seen the lack of acceptance by physicians as being a roadblock to the growth of dental sleep medicine, but physicians are just concerned about their patient’s welfare and need to know that the dentist understands the enormous problem that obstructive sleep apnea is to the overall health,” says Metz. “We intend to help breakdown the existing barriers.”

Cassandra Perez is associate editor for *Sleep Review*.