

Historic growth collections given new life

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For more than 75 years, hundreds of investigators across the country have contributed to longitudinal growth studies by collecting information on children who did not receive orthodontic treatment. This information is especially valuable today because it cannot be collected again. But many older records are deteriorating because of the normal breakdown of radiographic images.

The American Association of Orthodontists Foundation (AAOF), the charitable arm of the AAO, advances the orthodontic specialty by supporting education and research. The Planning and Awards Review Committee (PARC) of the AAOF plays an important role in deciding how funds are dispersed to fulfill the foundation's goals. At its January 2005 meeting, PARC considered several proposals aimed at preserving various aspects of several growth studies at a number of institutions. Rather than fund any of the disparate proposals submitted that year, PARC members recommended to the AAOF board that the preservation of historic collections should become a funding priority, second to the support of junior faculty. As part of that recommendation, they wanted to encourage those who had submitted proposals that year and in the past to collaborate and resubmit for further consideration a more global approach to this issue.

The AAOF board quickly approved PARC's recommendations to make preserving historic collections a priority. At meetings in May 2005 and January 2006, criteria for the records to be preserved and digitized were established, and issues related to how the information would be made available on the Internet were discussed. With these recommendations in place, PARC called for proposals to develop a planning grant for the preservation of the historic collections. The goal of the project was to protect, digitize, and disseminate the orthodontic collections so that they would be preserved and available to clinicians and researchers.

This special call for proposals was part of the awards program for 2007. PARC received several proposals that

year, but none addressed all items that PARC believed were needed. Also, they were looking for a truly collaborative proposal, one that included participation of each collection.

In November 2007, Mark Hans invited representatives of each historic growth collection to a meeting. This meeting was unprecedented in the history of orthodontics; representatives from 10 of the 11 known longitudinal growth studies met to work toward a common goal. From this meeting came a single joint proposal, submitted to PARC on behalf of 10 orthodontic legacy collections.

The AAOF board awarded this group \$120,000 to begin work. They created a web site, http://www.cril.org/aaof/aaof_home.asp, that shows their work to this point: nearly 900 lateral cephalograms of 80 subjects from 9 collections. Look at the web site to see what this group has accomplished in a short time. The collaboration on this project is unprecedented, and those involved deserve our appreciation for thinking first of the good of our specialty.

Both PARC and the AAOF board have been pleased with the progress on this project. Originally, the board budgeted another \$80,000 for the second year of the project, but, because of the downturn in the economy and the poor performance of the foundation's investments, the award was reduced to \$44,000. Reaching the goals of the project—to preserve and digitize a representative sample of these legacy collections—will cost an estimated \$1 million. To raise these funds, the AAOF is seeking new donations, including a few sizeable gifts. Anyone interested in supporting this project can contact Robert Hazel at the AAO or his or her constituent director to discuss giving options.

I want to personally thank all who put so much work into this project to preserve valuable information that can never be replaced and is so important to our specialty.

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