

Council on Membership, Ethics and Judicial Concerns Report

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The Council met in St. Louis on January 12, 2008. The major topics discussed concerned the increasing number of ethics complaints and membership-related issues.

Ethics complaints against members increased again this year. The majority of the complaints concerned advertising issues. The change in bylaws at the 2007 House of Delegates has proven to be beneficial thus far. In general, a complaint issued against a member regarding advertising is immediately remedied by the doctor on whom the complaint is filed. The usual response is, "I didn't know it was a violation." In the past, the investigating committee had no choice but to find the doctor in violation, with defined consequences that followed. The change implemented at the 2007 HOD allows the investigating committee to enter into an agreement with the doctor that allows the doctor to change, discontinue, or correct the advertising, with the stipulation that any further violations of this nature will be dealt with harshly. This seems reasonable to all parties involved. The committee encouraged the AAO to educate our members through articles in the Bulletin and on-line in the Straight Off the Wire. In particular, the Council wants to educate members to be careful if they choose to attach their practice name, or individual name, to advertising material provided by orthodontic manufacturers. It is the members' responsibility to make sure that public statements do not violate the AAO Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct.

Membership issues were reviewed. Membership numbers remain strong and there has been a negligible drop in membership due to the PR campaign assessment. The Council discussed the effect of continuing the PR campaign in 2008 with additional assessments, and the Council understands this may have an impact on membership. International membership also remains strong at 19% of our total membership. The Council voted to give international members a multiple-year option when joining or renewing membership. This may allow international members to take advantage of the favorable currency exchange rates at that time. The benefit to the AAO is that we may be able to keep international members from dropping membership in the years that international members do not plan to attend the AAO annual meeting. A subcommittee has been reinstated to continually review international membership and make recommendations that promote international membership so that the AAO will maintain its position as the premier orthodontic association in the world.

The Council discussed ethics in dental education and orthodontics. In light of recent stories of misconduct by dental school students and the rise in the number of ethics violation complaints received, the Council recommended that the AAO be proactive to keep ethical issues at the forefront in our publications. One suggestion was to provide a discount on the AAOIC insurance for completion of an ethics CE course, much the same as is currently done with the risk management course.