

Transition and Expansion to Serve People Worldwide

Reflections from a New Zealander

I am excited that the National Spasmodic Dysphonia Association (NSDA) is becoming Dysphonia International. This name change acknowledges our international outreach beyond the borders of the United States, and indeed North America. We have Support Groups outside the US, and Area Contact Persons in four continents. We have members in our database from all continents except Antarctica.

All of us in the NSDA are so grateful to the medical and scientific experts in the United States who support us in many different ways; I would add though that medical advancement and scientific knowledge is a two-way street between countries. I think about Dr Isshiki in Japan who pioneered thyroplasty for SD, Dr Jürgen Konczak from Germany who has received a research grant from the NSDA for investigating laryngeal vibration devices, Dr Christopher Honey in Vancouver, BC, Canada who is working in the Deep Brain Stimulation field for SD, and others, such as Kristina Simonyan who brought her skills from Armenia and then Germany to direct neurological research into spasmodic dysphonia at Massachusetts Eye and Ear. And our Founder, Dr Daniel Truong, to whom we owe so much, was born in Vietnam. These international connections, where medical and scientific experts worldwide can collaborate and learn from each other, provide a win-win for everyone in the voice community.

As a New Zealander I have been privileged to be part of the organization's leadership for almost 25 years, and I was honored to serve as our President from 2005 to 2010. The NSDA has been a broad-based, inclusive and patient-focused group, and the only organization that has a sole focus on spasmodic dysphonia and related voice-disorders. Right from Day 1, I felt welcome and was treated as a valued member of the Association. Like many SDR's I struggle with vocal communication - and I quickly realized when talking to my US-based colleagues that SD was the challenge, not my Kiwi accent! The benefits of belonging to the NSDA and the wonderful, dedicated and humble people I have met on-line and at NSDA events far outweigh my own struggles with my unreliable broken voice. I am especially appreciative of the volunteer pioneers who have given so much; I know that such outstanding service is its own reward, but let them know their influence has been felt across the oceans.

One of the most important messages the US voice community shares with new contacts is "You are Not Alone"; and in return, the rest of the world says to the US, "We are in the Same Boat!" I look forward to continued progress under our new name, Dysphonia International, as we strive towards our goal of finding cures and more effective treatments for all voice disorders.

David Barton

NSDA Past President (2005-2010)