



Beginnings of orthodontics in Mexico

Inicios de la ortodoncia en México

Martha Díaz Gómez*

The publication *Revista Mexicana de Ortodoncia* gives us the opportunity to remember the background of this specialty that arrived in Mexico in 1905.

The School of Orthodontics of Dr. Edward Angle (1855-1930), which opened in Saint Louis, Missouri in May 1900, was the first formal school that taught a dental postgraduate program in the United States and is considered the birth of the specialty. The creation of this school was the culmination of a much criticized project within the American dental guild, where there was strong opposition since the separation of orthodontics from general dentistry was considered harmful. Angle, which was one of the first dentists in limiting his private practice to orthodontics, had powerful detractors who saw his project as non-viable, so he decided to open a graduate school by his own means. Angle had already published his famous book «The dental malformations» (1887), where his classification was established: Class I, II and III considering the relation of the upper first molars with the lower first molars. His classification is still used.

THE SPECIALTY ARRIVES TO MEXICO

In his book «The natural and artificial teeth», published in 1894 professor Marian N. Ruiz, who was born in Chiapas, Mexico, talked about all areas of dentistry: dental anatomy, partial and total prosthodontics, pathology, surgical and dental materials. On orthodontics, he published a chapter entitled «The etiology, prevention and treatment of dental position anomalies». The author studied dentistry in New York and in spite of not having a dental degree he had contact with vanguard teachers of American dentistry. Unfortunately the book, published in Comitán, Chiapas, was not known at national level.

José J. Rojo was the first Mexican dentist that studied the specialty of orthodontics in the United

States. Aware of the existence of Edward Angle's new school, Dr. Rojo reached an agreement with Dr. Ricardo Crombe, headmaster of the Office of National Dental Education for being sent in 1904 to St. Louis, Missouri, to take the 8-week course that Dr. Angle offered, enough time to receive the diploma that accredited the students as orthodontists. On his return to Mexico, Dr. Rojo began to teach the subject of orthodontics in the newly inaugurated dental school. In his private practice, in addition to practicing general dentistry, Jose J. Rojo practiced orthodontics with Angle's technique, which involved placing German silver archwires that you could buy even with support bands and adjusting screws to be placed in the permanent first molars. The archwire was used for maxillary expansion and for correcting protrusion and retrusion problems, aided by bronze wire and intermaxillary elastics.¹

The impact of Jose J. Rojo's teachings on his students of the National Office of Dental Education was embodied in two theses on the topic: «Appliances for aligning teeth», by Alejandro Cabrera, and «Appliances for retaining aligned teeth», by Manuel Belt, both published in 1908.

During the second and third decade of the twentieth century, some dental surgeons included orthodontics in their practices, not yet considered a specialty, and other Mexicans studied the specialty in the United States. The most notable example of this period was Samuel Fastlicht, who after attending the VII International Dental Congress carried out in Paris and observing the progress that vanguard orthodontics offered, decided to study it. Once he obtained his degree, Fastlicht travelled to California where he took the specialty course with Master Spencer Atkinson

* History Department. Faculty of Dentistry, National Autonomous University of Mexico.

¹ Fastlicht Ripstein Jorge. Historia de la Asociación Mexicana de Ortodoncia. p. 15.

This article can be read in its full version in the following page: <http://www.medigraphic.com/ortodoncia>

and returned to Mexico in 1934 with knowledge and techniques. Fastlicht cultivated a very close friendship with his mentor, who was to become a real godfather for Mexican dentistry by annually teaching courses and clinic tables that were exploited by a good number of Mexican dentists.

The same year of his arrival in Mexico, Samuel Fastlicht founded the Mexican Association of Orthodontics, composed of a group of dentists interested in this young specialty: Francisco Calderon Case, Samuel Fastlicht, Rafael Ferris, Alberto Fisch, José Luis Legarreta, Manuel Valderrama and Miguel Díaz Mercado, who had also specialized in the United States. Master Atkinson was named honorary President of the Association and regularly traveled to Mexico accompanied by American Orthodontics teachers, who came to share their techniques and experiences. In the thirties and forties, dentists of the cities of Mexico City, Monterrey, Mérida, Guadalajara, San Luis Potosi, Hermosillo and Tijuana travelled to the United States to study the postgraduate course in orthodontics.

It is in the forties that we find the first records of female Mexican dentists who enrolled in the specialty in the United States. The first of these was Estela Barrera of Monterrey, Nuevo León, who at her return from San Antonio, Texas would become professor of this subject in her home state. Alicia Lazo de la Vega was the second woman to obtain a post-graduate degree in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and upon her return to Mexico City in 1948; she joined teaching at her *alma mater* and the Mexican Association of Orthodontics, which had grown in membership and projects. Lazo de la Vega encouraged teaching her specialty in the National School of Dentistry, trained dentists of the Mexican Social Security Institute and was an important link with societies and American schools to organize continuum education conferences at the National School of Dentistry. One of these was taught by Doctors Richard and Charles Tweed in 1952. Dentists of several cities of the republic attended this course. Two more cases of notable orthodontists of the era are those of Doctors Margarita Correa of Mexico City and Isabel Carreon of the port of Veracruz.

The Orthodontic Society kept a strong presence through seminars and lectures and thus the study of orthodontics increased. In almost every course, seminar and dental lecture carried out throughout the country, orthodontic topics were included and were frequently taught by foreign teachers.

In 1961 a group of 8 orthodontists who graduated in the United States and with support from the National Dental School (NDS) organized the first formal course of the Orthodontics Specialty in Mexico, which was taught by Dr. Ernest Hixon from Portland, Oregon. Headmaster Dr. Ignacio Reynoso Obregon gave instructions for a small classroom with 4 dental chairs and a laboratory to be conditioned for that end at the third floor of the NDS. In this course, two generations of orthodontists graduated. This was a time of great advancements in the orthodontics field and graduates had to learn new techniques that arrived from the United States. Sadly, the program was cancelled and several years had to pass before postgraduate courses were held again at the NDS. When the Division of Higher Studies of the National Dental School was founded, distinguished American and European professors were invited to collaborate, among them Hans P. Bimler from Germany and W.J. Tulley from England who spoke about active plates and activators. In 1968, the specialty was created again, this time under the leadership of Master Adolfo Unda Manterola.

With time and faced with a growing demand for graduate orthodontists, specialty study centers were created in several educational institutes in Mexico City and in other provinces of the country. From its inception to the present day, the Orthodontics Specialty Program that our Faculty of Dentistry offers has maintained its excellent academic quality in the formation of generations of specialists in the Mexican Republic and all of Latin America.

Mailing address:

Martha Díaz Gómez

E-mail: diazkuri@prodigy.net.mx