

The History of Sleep Medicine

Dennis R. Bailey, DDS^{a,b,*}, Ronald Attanasio, DDS, MSED, MSc^c

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- History • Oral appliances • Sleep medicine
- Dental sleep medicine

Sleep medicine as it is known today actually started as research and scientific study, not as clinical medicine. When one considers that sleep medicine today is in its infancy, it is obvious that there is much more to learn. The history of sleep dates back to the 1880s. However, the most significant developments that moved sleep forward into the practice of medicine, and eventually dentistry, occurred from the 1950s on. This article explores the highlights of the history of sleep and sleep medicine.

SLEEP: THE EARLY DAYS

1880 Gelineau, a French neurologist, recognizes narcolepsy and cataplexy as a condition associated with sudden sleep attacks, distinct from epilepsy.¹ This aspect of sleep was the earliest recognized.

1937 Loomis and colleagues² document the characteristics on an electroencephalogram of what is now known as NREM (non-rapid eye movement) sleep. Loomis outlines 5 stages of the increasing depth of sleep, classified as A through E.

1953 A new sleep stage called REM (rapid eye movement) sleep is discovered by Dement and Kleitman. This stage of sleep is believed to be associated with dreaming.³

1957 Dement and Kleitman³ propose a new classification of sleep, which proposes 4 stages of NREM sleep as well as REM sleep. These investigators describe how NREM sleep has increasing levels of depth, followed by REM. These 2 stages occur in repeating cycles throughout the night. This description of the sleep cycle continues to be used today, with few changes.

1964 A Narcolepsy Center is established at Stanford University.⁴

1966 Researchers in Europe describe the clinical entity of sleep apnea syndrome. This condition is associated with obstructive apneas and symptoms of daytime

^a Orofacial Pain and Dental Sleep Medicine, Dental Sleep Medicine Mini-Residency, UCLA School of Dentistry, 10833 Le Conte Avenue, CHS-Box 951668, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA

^b Private Practice, Denver, CO, USA

^c University of Nebraska College of Dentistry, Lincoln, NE 68583, USA

* Corresponding author. 8400 East Prentice Avenue, Suite 804, Greenwood Village, CO 80111.

E-mail address: RMC4E@aol.com

sleepiness that are often severe. At this point the only treatment is a tracheotomy.⁵

1968 A manual is developed for the scoring of sleep.

THE BEGINNING OF SLEEP AS A MEDICAL DISCIPLINE

In the 1970s sleep medicine started to become integrated in the practice of medicine. Throughout the 1970s there was significant activity that fostered sleep as a medical discipline and not just as a scientific or research field. During this time there was an increased interest by many of the related medical specialties, and sleep medicine as a subspecialty was beginning to take shape.

1970 Stanford University develop the first comprehensive sleep center, and the ability to perform nocturnal polysomnography (sleep study) is developed.

1975 At this time there are now 5 sleep centers. Up until this time sleep medicine has been viewed as experimental. At the same time the need for an organization that would be oriented around the sleep center and that would also provide a medical and research direction is created. The Association of Sleep Disorders Centers (ASDC) is duly founded. This organization today is known as the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM).⁴

1976 The ASDC form a nosology committee to develop a diagnostic system that will consider all of the various sleep and arousal disorders that are seen clinically.

1977 The ASDC accredits the first sleep center at Montefiore Hospital in New York City.

1978 The first issue of the journal *Sleep* is published.

As the organization dedicated to sleep medicine moved into the 1980s and the 1990s, the interest in this field was also growing. Through the 1980s the recognition and prevalence of sleep apnea as well as the treatment formed the basis for the developments over the decades to come. The number of people with an interest in sleep medicine and research was growing at an unprecedented rate. The number of events that occurred over these 2 decades was very significant. In the early 1990s dentistry became involved with sleep and sleep medicine through the establishment of the Sleep Disorders Dental Society.

1980 The first report on the successful use of an oral appliance is published: the tongue-retaining device.⁶

1981 Sullivan and colleagues⁷ introduce a new treatment for sleep apnea: continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). CPAP became the mainstay of treatment in the early days, and has continued to be the gold standard for the management of sleep apnea.

1986 The first scientific meeting dedicated to sleep and sleep disorders is held in Columbus, Ohio. The meeting is attended by more than 700 people and will eventually become an annual event. The meeting is jointly held by the ASDC, the Sleep Research Society (SRS), and the Association of Polysomnographic Technologists (APT), which become known collectively as the Associated Professional Sleep Societies (APSS).⁴

1987 Ancoli-Israel and colleagues use home testing devices, finding that in the 358 people tested, 31% of the men and 19% of the women have sleep apnea.⁸

1987 The ASDC changes its name to the American Sleep Disorders Association (ASDA) and will eventually be known as the AASM.

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