

Continuing Education

In the not too distant past, quality continuing dental education seminars were quite rare. Those that were offered presented topics that were far from the mainstream of clinical interest or of little practical value. Seminar sponsors frequently endeavored to increase enrollment with inducements of balmy beaches, snowy slopes, or other special added attractions.

As the concept of formal continuing education programs was developed, the scope and value of the courses increased. Dental schools and other accredited agencies soon learned that a good format, an informed and talented lecturer, and a current subject matter produced results. These sponsors also noted, and noted well, that marginal or uninteresting topics were losers that could and would reflect adversely on the enrollment of their future offerings.

The dental schools, in recognizing their responsibility to the practicing profession, have continued to offer a plethora of topics that appeal to broad ranges of interest and intent. Also offering continuing education programs are our dental societies. These often are in conjunction with the national meetings. Several specialist groups have also developed and presented programs with recognized and reputable speakers.

The postgraduate education milieu also includes "information" and "knowledge" sources that have become known as Hilton University or Holiday Inn College courses. These often are one-man productions, from course mailings, meeting arrangements, and course presentations to awarding certificates or diplomas. These entrepreneurial operations usually present the solo organizer's personal biases and concepts of diagnosis, treatment, or technological implements. They often address areas of esoteric or peripheral philosophy with just enough scientifically sound information to extrapolate and exploit. These seminars are often touted as credible, but are without evidence of review or acceptance by recognized accreditors. It would seem that one benefit of these independent presentations is personal profit, which would explain why we see old ones continue and new ones blossom.

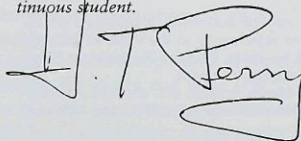
Several state licensing boards now require a specific number of hours annually of approved continuing education courses to maintain the validity of a license to practice. This code of enforced education may be an irritant to some of our colleagues; however, the necessity to improve and hone our professional skills should be

apparent to all of us. This author can remember occasions in the early 1960s when interested professionals requested permission to visit our clinic or private practice to observe TMJ diagnostic and treatment protocols. These interested individual practitioners were eager to learn, and with no formal courses available they sought their own. These requests were difficult to refuse but their acceptance also created logistical problems in the clinic or the private office. The motivation and desire for more knowledge by these individuals was a personal reward for me. My time and effort created and produced some life-long professional friends, who in a couple of instances now far exceed my ability in the field.

Our specialty has progressed a long way from those early days and intervening continuing education programs. The recent national meeting of the American Academy of Orofacial Pain in Scottsdale, Arizona provided an excellent format for learning. The codevelopers of the program certainly selected a coterie of speakers with a prodigious spectrum of expertise and interest. It was pure pleasure to be able to understand the clinical relations of complex chemical and neurologic phenomena because of the speaker's succinct explanation and clarity of delivery. This was not an isolated occurrence, but one that was repeated throughout the entire program. The quality of the material, the excellence of the speakers, the prescient ability of the organizers to select topics and moderators for maximum audience participation after lectures or at the poster event, all combined to maintain a high attendance in the heart of golf and tennis territory. The program was a premier example of continuing education and has set a formidable model to follow. It definitely was not a mundane chiaroscuro, but a vibrant technicolor production. I, for one, thoroughly enjoyed "harvesting" my CE hours for North Dakota and Illinois license validity.

A professional man has no right other than to be a continuous student.

—G.V. Black



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