

## Guest Editorial **Actions Count! The Challenge and Fun of Dentistry**

In 1971, I bade farewell to the periodontal residency program at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine and began a solo practice in Burlington, Vermont, as the second periodontist in the state. Many of my college friends are now retired, as are a number of my dental colleagues. At a recent Sigma Chi fraternity reunion, when I was asked when I plan to retire, my stock answer was, "Not until dentistry ceases to be fun."

Why is dentistry, and especially periodontics, so much "fun" for me? There are many reasons, but the main one is that in my 37 years of dental practice, 32 years of which were specialty practice, I have participated in so many changes that I am never bored or feel that the practice of dentistry is perfunctory. I am still excited about what I do every day that I practice or teach.

There has been quite a change in dentistry since I entered the profession. When I began dental school in 1962, we used belt-driven handpieces. Talk about slow speed! There were no air rotor handpieces, either slow or high speed, at our school. When I received my certificate in periodontology in 1971, gingival grafts were for increasing the zone of gingiva; some said that it was only scar tissue, not a true graft. Root coverage would not be possible because there was no blood supply emanating from the root. Regeneration was at best confined to narrow, deep, three-walled defects and was not predictable. I am sure that there are many still practicing who graduated before me and could add to the list of "cannot be done." Many sacred cows have now fallen, and procedures not even given the slightest chance for success are now commonly performed with predictable results. One needs only look at present-day implantology to realize this.

What propelled us into contemporary dentistry and will continue to move us forward? Actions count! We arrived on the dreams of our predecessors, our mentors, many of whom still practice and are now the leaders of our profession. Our future is seen in the American Academy of Periodontology's "2020 Vision."

Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, but opinions are meaningless unless they are evidence based. We are presently building that evidence for our 2020 goals. As a profession, we must confirm what we say and what we dream. We do so by using the existing evidence to support our new ideas. That said, we must not be afraid to dream or speak of what we dream for fear of being proven wrong.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "We must become the change we want to see in the world." To paraphrase in dental terms, we must look for change; think outside the box to realize the goals that will further our profession. We have reached a sophisticated level with implant dentistry, esthetic hard and soft tissue regeneration, and restorative procedures, but being right and predictable is a pleasant but passing phase. Doing only those procedures with which we feel comfortable will leave us behind as individuals and as a profession. Using evidence-based decisions will validate new ideas before trying them and bring forth new avenues of therapy, enhancing patient care. Sometimes our trials will be incorrect, giving us the opportunity to better ourselves through introspection and thus improve the care we provide for the public. We affirm what we do by our successes; however, by assessing our failures we even further increase our prospects for growth.

The absolute worst that we can be is irrelevant. Complacency is unforgivable and a waste of human spirit. It is also a waste of our education. We need to be out there learning. The "practice" of dentistry means just that! Our challenge is to bring forth new ideas and confront the old dogma.

Now, please understand why I am not retiring. I'm having fun feeling that I contribute to our profession, and there are so very many problems left to solve and therapies left to improve!

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*The impetus for this piece came from reading a speech given in June 2003 by Alexey Bulokov, Senior Orator, St Lawrence University, Canton, New York.*