

Editorial

Across-the-board salary increases—A reward for mediocrity

Regrettably, salary adjustment is not used in our dental schools, to the degree it should be, to send productive or unproductive dental school faculty the right message.

Few would argue that an individual's salary, and specifically the potential for a substantial increase, can be a major incentive for performance and productivity. An individual's salary should be a way to reward performance in the manner of annual merit advances in addition to normal cost-of-living increases. But salary adjustment also can and should be used as a disincentive to those who have chosen the path of unofficial early "retirement." It is no secret that after obtaining tenure, many university faculty members choose to do as little as possible, while other more productive colleagues are forced to carry extra work loads.

University administrators seem to believe that everyone should receive the same percentage increase in salary each year. Certainly they are loath to ever reduce an individual's salary. Perhaps this is particularly true in state-run institutions where state guidelines and layers of red tape make efficient administration of a dental school's financial affairs fraught with difficulty. However, what law says that an individual is worth a certain salary and that he or she is never deserving of less in the future?

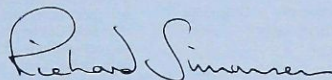
My experiences of dental education at four different state universities in the United States lead me to believe that the merit pay raise for dental school teaching faculty is essentially a sham. Particularly in the last few years of ever-tightening reins on the budgets of many universities nationwide, it has become apparent that the merit pay raise is an endangered species. Time and time again we see that university deans, themselves or through their chairmen, give across-the-board salary increases to all faculty. It is argued, extremely unconvincingly in my opinion, that since so little is available for merit pay everyone should be rewarded with the same (small) percentage increase. Popycock! Nothing destroys incentive, and rewards

mediocrity, more than equal reward for unequal performance.

Dental school deans and chairmen should not only have the power, but also the courage, to decrease a faculty member's salary—let's say by 10% per year—in order not only to send a message that low productivity will not be tolerated, but also to provide a pool of available funds to raise the salary level of the most productive faculty members over and above the across-the-board general increases. It is a spineless cop-out to mandate that everyone on the faculty should receive the same percentage salary increase and that no one should receive a salary decrease.

Without the willingness to use the incentive or disincentive of salary adjustment, up or down, a university dental school will never earn the maximum productivity from the faculty. Nor will unproductive faculty ever be stimulated to change their ways. If dental schools are to keep their most productive faculty members, and keep them happy, then the message must go out to all that salaries will be adjusted significantly up *and* down at regular intervals depending on performance review. Such a tactic would also ensure that unproductive faculty will quickly get the message that poor performance will not be tolerated. They will then either have to improve their performance or once again be "rewarded" with a salary decrease at the next opportunity. This may be the only way to get rid of unproductive tenured faculty in this age of state protection for the lazy.

My hat is off to the dental school deans—I know of at least one!—who are secure enough in their positions to use salary decreases where appropriate. If only more would follow suit.



Richard J. Simonsen
Editor-in-Chief