

The Necessity for Major Reform in Dental Education
A Santa Fe Group Planning Conference
August 29-30, 2004

“Innovative Partnerships for Dental Education”

A Topic Paper and Presentation
By
Howard M. Landesman, D.D.S., M.Ed.

The high cost of providing a dental education is an established fact. Concerns that dental education was not impervious to changes in the economic environment have been voiced for decades in a variety of different venues. For example, the 1983 report of the American Dental Association's Special Committee on the Future of Dentistry stated, "The continued operation of a dental education program will probably depend upon its ability to attract additional revenue, to control expenditures, to muster political support, to meet manpower needs of a state or region and to remain financially solvent in an atmosphere of declining resources, higher costs and changing priorities."

The American Dental Association's (ADA) 2001 *Future of Dentistry Report, Today's Vision: Tomorrow's Reality* echoed this issue. In the area of financing dental schools, it concluded "in the absence of extraordinary financial initiatives by states or the federal government or a massive outpouring of private donations from industry and dentists, there would be a continual increase in the cost of education and student debt. Lack of a diverse student body and dental faculty, faculty shortages and the state of dental schools' physical plants were also noted as issues for concern."

With the latest national economic downturn dramatically reducing the dollars available for public education, many state dental schools are facing major reductions or even possible elimination of their educational programs. Even private dental schools are searching for new revenues beside the traditional increases in tuition.

Even though the nation is noting the first signs of economic recovery, dental education does not appear to be a high-priority recipient. Last year, most dental schools were forced to make drastic budget cuts. Dental schools throughout the nation had their state budgets reduced by as much as 30%. Tuition increases were the norm, with one state institution reporting an increase of 50%. There is a crisis in dental education that threatens to destabilize the underpinnings of the entire dental profession.

Orthodontics is not insulated from this crisis. In the September 9, 2002 bulletin of the American Association of Orthodontists, President James Gjerset stated, "A crisis looms. Our ability to continue to provide the highest quality of orthodontic care to the people of our nation is threatened." He continues by stating that "the end result of this vicious cycle is that the number of new orthodontists will surely decline." The AAO President then states "that demographic studies show that within 10 years we will experience a serious shortfall in the availability of dental and dental specialists."

In the May 2004 issue of the American Journal of Orthodontics, Redmond et al stated that "The specialty of orthodontics is witnessing 2 opposing trends: because of population growth and increasing awareness of orthodontics, the number of new patients is rising steadily every year; at the same time, because of the graying of the profession and the dwindling number of orthodontic residents, the number of active clinicians is expected to decline."

The high cost of a dental education coupled with a dwindling number of specialists has surfaced as a major issue as the profession seeks solutions to an impending crisis in one of its most critical

underpinnings. Tweaking the system may work in the short term, but major changes are needed if the dental education industry is to continue to be the world's gold standard.

Most of all, universities have to recognize that public funding for higher education, as the dominant source of support, has come to the end of its cycle. As we move forward, public universities will have to look to fund-raising, entrepreneurial ventures, partnership agreements and tuition fees to find the money for their operating costs.

Links between education, business and government are common. Also, alliances between business or government and institutions of higher education are not uncommon. Those enrolled in the CVS Pharmacy's scholarship program can receive monies to assist with their education in exchange for working for CVS full-time as a registered pharmacist. In business, it is not unusual for a large corporation to pay tuition to a University so that their employees can attend the University's business school and obtain an MBA while the employees continue to work for the corporation. In dentistry, the National Health Service Corps, the Indian Health Service and the U.S. Armed Forces are examples of partnerships between education and government in which students receive scholarships and stipends in exchange for a post-graduation practice commitment. Special care must be taken to insure accountability and a hands-off policy when any institution or association accepts money from private enterprise.

To thrive, leaders in higher education must seek more creative relationships with corporate America. These relationships will enhance the education of students in new and innovative ways to practice, and create an enhanced standard of excellence for our graduates.

One example of such a partnership is the University of Colorado School of Dentistry's long-term relationship with the Orthodontic Education Company. A \$3 million gift and a commitment for \$92.7 million are enabling the school of dentistry to construct the 95,000 square foot Lazzara Center for Oral-Facial Health on its Fitzsimons campus. The center will be the main facility for the school. In addition, it will house the school's new specialty program in orthodontics and other dental education programs. The program will enroll 16 orthodontic residents each year in a 27-month program. There will be a seven-year post-graduate commitment to work for OEC for the 12 OEC scholarship residents enrolled in the program each year.

The standards for accepting students will be no different than any other orthodontic program in the nation. The curriculum will be as rigorous as others. The school will have total control of the admissions standards, content of the curriculum and philosophy of the program.

Demographic changes will raise the demands that the dental workforce become more racially and ethnically diverse and that dental care be more culturally responsive. The partnership will help increase diversity of the U.S. Health Care workforce in orthodontics.

According to numbers from the Survey Center of the American Dental Association, 9,294 orthodontists in the United States reported that:

- 170 (1.8%) are Hispanic
- 117 (1.25%) are African American

- 7 (.07%) are Native American

As a result of scholarship opportunities, a larger number of qualified graduating students from diverse and economically disadvantaged backgrounds will participate in specialty training. In 2004 the Institute of Medicine(IOM) published a text entitled, "In The Nation's Compelling Interest-Ensuring Diversity in the Health-Care Workforce." The University of Colorado School of Dentistry's new public/private partnership was cited as a model for education funding to increase the number of URM's in health professions programs. The IOM also felt that this type of partnership may be an innovative way to deal with an anticipated shortage of orthodontists as well as a variety of other health professionals in the next decade and finance education while reducing the burden on taxpayers, students, and parents. They recommended that "Private entities should be encouraged to collaborate through business partnerships and other entrepreneurial relationships with HPEIs to support the common goal of developing a more diverse health-care workforce."

Additionally, the General Assembly of the State of Colorado unanimously passed a resolution, which congratulated and honored us for our creative efforts to improve the education and oral health of the citizens of the State of Colorado as a result of this unique public/private partnership.

The University of Colorado School of Dentistry was granted initial accreditation for the orthodontic program on July 30, 2004. The program will start September, 2004.

In the Institute of Medicine's 1995 publication entitled "Dental Education at the Crossroads, Challenges and Changes" it clearly stated that "Success will require collaboration, a will to break down barriers of isolation and pooling of resources for a common good. Such coalitions must cross all boundaries and involve groups both inside and outside the profession." The report continues with the statement,....."the future of dental education is necessarily linked to its contributions to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of oral health services through education, research and patient care. It must not only contribute but also be perceived as contributing---by the dental profession, the university, and society generally. For dental education to meet the challenges that lie ahead will require the support and involvement of the practitioner community as well as researchers and policymakers."

In other words, we are all in this together-educators and practitioners. The success of either is dependent upon the success of the other, and our ability to recognize and address change as a positive experience will determine our fates.

In the year 1515 it was stated that "there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies, all of those who have done well under the old conditions, and luke warm defenders, in those, who may do well under the new. The coolness arises partly from fear of the opponents, who have the laws on their side, and partly from the skepticism of men, who do not readily believe in mew things until they have had long experience of them."

Almost five hundred years later, change elicits the same responses as those just described.

A sense of powerlessness, of confusion, of fear, and even anger are natural human responses to change. Philosophers, religious leaders, and other writers throughout the ages have attempted to alleviate these discomforts through the teachings in works from the Chinese Book of Changes to recent best sellers on how to face life changes. Change is a fact of life, an unavoidable given, and despite the feelings, it generates an instrument of growth, the forerunner of progress. One reason change inspires such feelings is the risk it entails. When faced with change, the imagination conjures ten thousand answers, all negative, in response to the question, "what if...?" But an adage from the business world, so well known it is nearly a cliché, states unconditionally, "No risk, No Gain."

So, coming at this vulnerable moment when many of us here today are questioning the future of dental education, how can a multitude of changes contribute to our growth as educators, or better yet, as human beings?

I believe we are in the countdown. As we engage in changes we never thought possible, our world spirals in flux. The signs are everywhere. The media proclaim social, political, economic change; plans for dental education and our profession are on the lips of all dental school deans in the nation, who utter phrases like, "creating the future of dentistry" in their addresses. As professionals and citizens we face changing patient populations, as yet untamed infectious diseases, new technologies, and more.

As adversarial as changing institutions of learning may appear now, they are providing experience in meeting the challenges all of us can expect to face in the 21st century, and providing guided experience, the traumas moderated by you, the seasoned educators who are very much in the mainstream and responsible for the future of our profession.

Although it may not seem valuable today, I predict that in the 21st century, we will be thankful for these changes.

To paraphrase the venerable Chinese Tome, the *I Ching*, "Change comes like a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder. The people shrink in fear, but after the storm, flowers bloom".

So, I predict that each of us will blossom, committed to an unsurpassed standard of excellence. We will have an exceptional ability to weather the challenges of a changing system of education, a changing profession and a changing world.