

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

OUR PROFESSION IN FLUX

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A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Big changes are coming. In December 2008, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that President Obama's administration would focus on healthcare reform in his economic recovery package. Of course, the current economic crisis is requiring the public to make difficult decisions regarding disposable income. And everyone in healthcare is working hard to try to cater to patients—including direct marketing to the public by product vendors—necessitating that providers must protect their patient bases.

Dr. Bryan Williams, a PCSO Board member, stated: "The balance beam may be tipping to the point where general practitioners will be regarded as competitors . . . (with an) increasing incursion of general practitioners into areas of dentistry that have historically been regarded as areas of clinical care that has been provided by specially trained dentists."

FACING THE CHALLENGE

In the last issue of the *Bulletin*, I briefly mentioned employing "kaizen" (continuous improvement) to keep your personal and practice life growing. John Halamka, CIO, Dean of Technology at Harvard Medical School, states, ". . . in the long haul, the struggling economy could result in the perfect storm. . ." Given the economic climate, and general practitioners referring fewer patients to specialists, demand for orthodontic care may decline. This "perfect storm" necessitates the incorporation of "kaikaku" (radical change and improvement) into our business plan.

OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVEMENT

Fortunately, orthodontist practices are experiencing a positive change as well: an increase in adult patients. The baby boomer generation is concerned with maintaining their teeth longer and improving esthetics. Adult cases are more complex to treat than adolescents,



and these patients appreciate quality care; but do be mindful that we work in a litigious environment. For although the increase in adult patients represents an opportunity for us as orthodontic specialists, we must recognize that adults often require interdisciplinary care of complex dental/facial problems. Our specialty cannot diagnose and treat all the problems alone and therefore cannot achieve quality care without collaboration with other specialties.

Collaboration is the solution. One specialty cannot see all the problems and therefore cannot achieve quality care until all the problems have been identified. Working with appropriate specialists, we can develop treatment options and sequencing. The entire team must work in unison.

By working with other dental specialties to manage restorative challenges, occlusal function, stability, airway, habits, TMD, as well as facial balance and smiles, orthodontists can render maximum results. At times, we must involve pediatricians, plastic surgeons, and ENT specialists to help develop the comprehensive treatment options necessary to treat birth defects, trauma, pathological problems, and genetic growth patterns so that we can arrive at normality and acceptable cosmetic results.

Only by providing quality care will we be successful.

RAISING AWARENESS OF THE SPECIALTY

Our profession is filled with committed and skilled orthodontists. But talent alone will not draw patients into our offices.

When Gertrude Stein wrote, "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," she probably meant nothing is as beautiful as a rose, but it would be irrelevant if no one sees it. The same is true with orthodontists. An orthodontist's talents are unappreciated if the public is unaware of what he or she can do. To educate the public, the AAO has an ongoing Consumer Awareness Campaign. To address this down market, the AAO Board of Trustees (BOT) has established a Communication Task Force to oversee perfecting the message to the public.

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