

## Get Out of the Box

**T**wo years ago, the American Dental Association created the Institute for Diversity in Leadership. This program was designed to expand the knowledge and ability of individual dentists to serve as leaders in their communities. It was the intent of the institute to select individuals who have been in practice for several years and who represent racial, ethnic and/or gender groups that have not traditionally provided significant numbers of leaders. The dentists who are accepted into the institute are educated in the skills that would enable them to have an effect on dental health programs in their community, their state professional association, and nationally. The program includes didactic education provided by professors from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University and seminars at the ADA. Each participant develops a health care project to be designed and implemented within the year.

Many applications were received when the programs were initiated. Fortunately, a number of very qualified and highly motivated California dentists were accepted into the training. Each has taken on a different project and has been successful in the completion of their work. The CDA Executive Committee has been privileged to hear brief reports of the projects, progress and attitudes that these individuals had within the program. Each of them came from a different background with a different emphasis in their dental practice.

A busy prosthodontist in the Department of Veterans Affairs' hospital system and director of three affiliated dental clinics, John Jow recognized that a large segment of the homeless veteran popula-

tion that did not receive dental care. In an effort to correct this and help alleviate dental disease in that population, his project was to coordinate dental screening and care at Stand Down health fairs for veterans. In cooperation with CDA and TDIC using the mobile dental van, his ability to coordinate care has been remarkable. This very successful program will be repeated semiannually.

Coming from a practice in Burbank with a focus on dental implants and esthetic dentistry, Jose-Luis Ruiz identified a limited participation of Hispanics in dentistry and dental hygiene. His project, in conjunction with the University of Southern California School of Dentistry, was in the development of the USC Hispanics for Dentistry program, which focused on mentoring Hispanic students to consider dentistry and dental hygiene as a career. He was able to coordinate a commitment from the school to take proactive measures to facilitate an increase in the numbers of Hispanic students entering the profession.

Gayle Kawahara is a general practitioner in Los Angeles. Part of her education in the program included classes in negotiation and sales training. Her interests were in the study of osteoporosis and its relationship to periodontal disease. As a result of her participation in the institute, she has been able to counsel her patients more appropriately, communicate these considerations through written columns in newsletters and presentations, and raise dental awareness of this pervasive and destructive condition.

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This year, California is privileged to have two additional individuals participating in the institute.

Nava Fathi is an endodontist from Gilroy. She has a project to develop a mentoring program through the University of the Pacific Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry. Her tasks include recruiting alumni mentors and pairing them with current students. The value of the program will be in affording opportunities for future employment and practice ownership for new graduates. In addition, this will let the mentors recruit and assess potential buyers for their practices as they retire. The education of these students in the reality of practice will be beneficial to their overall development. The project will begin with a day-long conference to be held at the school.

Access to dental care, long a problem in many areas of this state, has been the focus of a project by Brian Shue, who is a general dentist and dental director of the Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo in Brawley. He has undertaken a program that will promote awareness of the provisions of the licensure-by-credential regulations. The law states that a minimum of five years of experience is needed for application. However, with a minimum of two years experience in another state and a commitment to provide health care in a designated community health center, candidates can come to California earlier than five years. With appropriate marketing, he hopes to increase the number of dentists practicing in designated underserved areas.

At the conclusion of their projects, each of the current students will be invited to make a presentation to the CDA Executive Committee on the scope and findings of their efforts. We look forward to learning from them later this year.

Each of these courageous individuals was willing to sacrifice time from their al-

ready busy practices and personal lives to undertake a project that offered them a chance to blossom and grow. As we reviewed the results of their labors, we realized they had become enriched by the experiences they had in the process. The individuals in this program have grown as a result of the intellectual stimulation of a nonclinical dental-specific application of their knowledge and skills. Equally important, we, as a profession, have improved ourselves in the delivery of dental health care to our patients. Most significantly, our patients have benefited by the increased breadth of experiences these dentists have had. We applaud the efforts made by these individuals and the programs sponsored by the ADA, which enabled them to participate. It is to the betterment of dental care in America these programs continue to train our health professionals.

As dentists we tend to focus on tiny parts of the anatomy and perform precision repair and treatment. Consistent with this is the cottage nature of our practices with most of us working in small offices or clinics treating one patient at a time. It is understandable that we can become somewhat myopic in our professional careers. We have much to contribute to our profession, the overall health of our patients, and to society. To paraphrase Dr. Kawahara, dentists work in a box; this type of experience offers an opportunity to get out of the box.

Dentists are capable of global thinking and providing health care on a widespread basis, as well as for individual patients. Projects like the Institute for Diversity in Leadership allow us to take the bright individuals who volunteer for participation and help them flourish into more productive leaders in dentistry. More of these types of programs, with emphasis on expanding our vistas, can only provide better care for patients. They are to be congratulated. **CDA**