

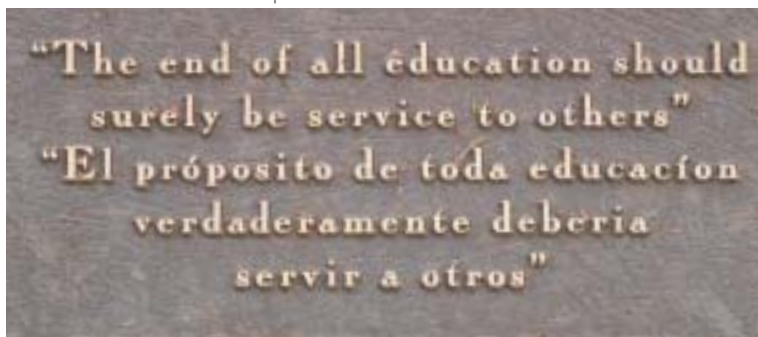
# Professional Hallmarks

*The end of all education should surely be service to others.*

— CESAR ESTRADA CHAVEZ



As I took a shortcut across the USC campus the other day, I discovered this plaque and quote. Being close to the school of dentistry, I paused for a moment to take in the serene environment and ponder the words of Chavez. They seem particularly applicable to our profession because these two endeavors, education and service, are such integral components of dentistry. In fact, I firmly believe that by focusing our efforts in these two areas, we can overcome any challenges we face as individual dentists or as a united profession. Let's examine each and



see what we're doing and what we could be doing to promote and improve our efforts.

When most of us think of dental education, we think of dental school. After all, it is where we all started our journey as dentists. I have previously shared comments on dental schools in this column. I would assert, however, that the most critical part of our education comes after we graduate. I heard Dr. Gordon Christensen, known and respected worldwide for his clinical skills and knowledge, say that when he graduated dental school, he was "just barely not dangerous." I've grappled with similar feelings. Many aspects of the dental procedures I perform on a daily basis were learned, not in dental school, but in continuing education courses and in practice through repeti-

tion. One such procedure that comes immediately to my mind is Class II composite restorations. A quick informal survey of my colleagues tells me I'm not alone. The road to placing excellent Class II composites has included mastering such techniques as rubber dam isolation, minimal preparations, bi-tine rings, sectional matrices, dentin bonding, sensitivity control with glass ionomer liners, flowable composite layers, incremental build-up techniques, directional and ramped curing, finishing and polishing. Several years ago, I was a master at none of these. I hated posterior composites so much I fell in love with them. The joy was in overcoming the challenge through education.

It is inspiring to see those who continue to further their dental training, not because they have to but because they love to. I hope I have as much passion about learning when I am as old as some of my colleagues and mentors who, even in retirement and even into their 80s, relentlessly pursue continuing education. Many may not be aware of CDA's efforts to be integrally involved in its members' lifelong education. Most visible is Scientific Sessions. Many of us have participated in these bi-annual events and

are aware of the quality of speakers and programs that are offered. But CDA is also developing online learning and other avenues to promote education. CDA is continually making efforts to provide quality, reliable and relevant continuing education to its members.


What about service? I think of service as being divided into three categories: service to patients, service to the public, and service to the profession. By nature, dentistry is a service profession. We serve patients everyday. How and how well we serve them varies widely among individual dentists and is often the subject of debate. Much of the profession's service to the public is often performed by individual dentists with little or no public fanfare. These individuals form the grassroots of the profession's public service. Some examples of these efforts are dentists who participate in school screenings, partake in school educational talks, volunteer at small community clinics or travel to remote areas both in and outside of the country providing much needed dental care.

There is another arm of public service that occurs on a grander scale often with a higher degree of public visibility. These efforts are often carried out by concerted efforts of the tripartite of organized dentistry. The Give Kids a Smile program is one example, and the CDA Foundation is another. The former has received much press, I would like to briefly mention the latter. In a report to the Board of Trustees in February, CDA Foundation Chairman, Brian Scott, DDS, outlined no less than 20 strategic initiatives for 2004/2005 and six long-range goals and objectives through 2012! I'm sure staff would be happy to provide any member with details of these activities but suffice to say that your foundation is working hard to serve the public on every member's behalf.

Many of us are aware of countless individuals who serve the profession at many levels. If there is any doubt that dentists give back to their profession, one need look

no further than a CDA or ADA House of Delegates meeting, take a roll call of the volunteer faculty at our dental schools, or attend a meeting of the International Association of Dental Research. The sum total of these efforts is a dental profession that continues to be strong in its leadership, that continues to effectively train tomorrow's professionals, and continues to discover new and better materials and techniques to treat our patients.

So may we rest on our current laurels in the areas of education and service? What type of grade would we receive in these two areas? I think Cesar Chavez would probably give us a B+. We certainly make noble efforts in these areas and outshine many other professions with our endeavors. But we can always do better. Dentistry is still pervaded by individuals who seek only minimal continuing education, and is even tainted by those who use dishonesty to obtain these minimal requirements. Several years ago, a program called QUIL3 (Quality Improvement through Life-long Learning) met with sharp criticism and unfortunately was not resoundingly accepted by the profession. Furthermore, the percentage of dentists who voluntarily serve the public and the profession are, by all estimations, a scarce minority. And much of the good that is done is undone by those who place their own financial interests and goals above the best interests of the patient, doing a disservice to everyone but themselves.

Perhaps our professional future will be enhanced by refocusing on the value of education and service. Perhaps we will have a new wave of leaders who promote and foster an environment that allows service and education to flourish far beyond current levels. And perhaps one day dentistry will be a showcase of individuals who not only believe that education and service are hallmarks of the profession but who, like Cesar Chavez, embody these virtues through their words and their actions. 

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