

Expanding Frontiers of Pediatric Dentistry

The innovative promotion campaign advertising "Going to the Dentist is for Babies," by the Academy of Pediatric dentists of Ventura County has been highly successful (see *Academy Newsletter*, February, 1981). It appropriately reflects one small aspect of the specialty skills of pedodontists that the public is not fully aware of. The present public relations campaign of the Academy emphasizes other aspects of the specialty skills of pedodontists which should have positive impact on the "busyness" of pedodontists in the future. Conferences on marketing dentistry have pointed out that, as a dental profession, we have been extremely reluctant to promote the need and stimulate the demand for dental services which are obviously widespread among the population, even in the economically well-to-do. Dentistry has never been a high consumer priority, not because there is no need for better dental services, but because consumers have not been aware of the serious consequences of poor dental health or the positive aspects of optimal oral health. One of the very effective ways of improving the health of the population is to emphasize primary prevention.

J. Michael McGinnis, M.D., Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health and Assistant Surgeon General of the Department of Health and Human Services emphasized that much has been accomplished around the country in the last year to advance our progress towards the broad goals of prevention. Two documents have recently been published enumerating these preventive activities; the first, *Promoting Health/Preventing Disease: Objectives for The Nation*, establishes national targets to be achieved by 1990 in 15 key-action areas. Water fluoridation and dental health are important target areas of this report. The second document entitled *Prevention/80* is an annual report which describes federal prevention activities and reviews the major accomplishments of the past year.

Much research is needed on early infant care. For example, the role of training devices and the use of various types of pacifiers on the oral-facial muscular development and occlusion needs to be conducted.

Another area that pedodontists have not paid sufficient attention to is soft tissue disease prevention and treatment. A Special Issue of *Pediatric Dentistry*, containing the proceedings of the International Symposium on Prevention of Periodontal Disease in Children and Adolescents, clearly shows that periodontal disease is on the increase, particularly in

the minority population. In a recent issue of *Dental Clinics of North America*, (Oct. 1980), several methods of periodontal examinations and muco-gingival screening methods were suggested. Relatively simple but effective methods of documenting gingivitis and periodontal disease are available.

Educators in pedodontics have a major responsibility to teach the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of soft tissue lesions in children to dental and postdoctoral students and in continuing education courses.

With fewer caries occupying daily practice, pedodontists should be able to deliver a higher quality of care and to devote more time for careful occlusal analyses in order to diagnose developing malocclusion and other developmental problems of the dentition. The incidence of malocclusion in the mixed dentition is extremely high and interceptive orthodontics based on sound diagnosis, treatment planning, and early intervention should increasingly be the responsibility of the specialty of pedodontics. These problems can be treated in conjunction with orthodontists or completely by the pedodontist depending on qualifications and experience. The dual specialty training of pedodontics and orthodontics holds much promise as future leaders in both dental education and private practice strive to assure the most comprehensive service to children possible.

On another front, pedodontists are in ever greater demand in hospital dentistry. The need for specialty care for handicapped persons and medically compromised children and adolescents will increase, and pedodontists have taken the leadership role in these endeavors.

There is a great need for high quality, preventive-oriented dental services to be delivered to children. However, the need is not appropriately matched by demand or funding. We must intensify our efforts to increase public awareness, demand, and utilization of the expertise of pedodontists to the fullest extent. Meanwhile, we must be conscious of the need to expand our own horizons professionally through continuing education courses, scientific literature, and any other means to meet the challenging changes of the practice of pedodontics in the years to come.

Stephen