

Marketing the dental profession

Marketing is becoming a byword in dentistry. As the term relates to dental practice it frequently is misunderstood, and some members of our profession believe that it can be harmful to the good image that we have worked so hard to achieve.

There is another type of marketing that all members of the profession should agree is essential if we are to continue as a highly respected health-serving profession. I refer to marketing dentistry as a profession to talented, academically superior young men and women.

The number of applicants to dental school has decreased alarmingly from a high of 16,000 in 1975 to an estimated 6100 for the entering 1985 class. This applicant pool will represent a ratio of applicants to first-year positions in dental classes of 1.3 to 1. First-year class size in dental schools in the United States also has declined from a high of 6300 in 1978 to 5048 in 1984, and there probably will be an additional decline as more schools reduce their class sizes. Fortunately, the academic preparedness of the applicants has not declined significantly, but if the number of applicants continues to dwindle, some schools may be forced to lower their academic standards to fill their first-year classes.

What is responsible for the declining applicant pool? Undoubtedly there are many factors; unfortunately, one of them may be that some members of our profession have expressed negative attitudes toward dentistry as a profession with a bright future. These negative comments have discouraged some qualified young people from considering dentistry as a profession. Other factors include the economic recessions of 1972-73 and 1981-83 which have resulted in reduced busyness in the dental office. Alternative delivery and financing systems have been unacceptable to some members of our profession, causing them to express doubts about the survival of dental practice as we know it. The bad press that dentistry has received recently in some leading magazines has caused some young people to look to other career opportunities.

The rapidly increasing cost of a dental education

has taken its toll in discouraging some young people who cannot see the possibility of financing their program without going in debt heavily. Also, it should be recognized that dental schools are looking for a particular type of individual for whom every other employer in the country is competing. There is a fantastic job market today for individuals who have the ability to grasp and understand the sciences and mathematics, as well as for those who possess decision-making skills.

So now and in the years ahead we must intensify our recruiting efforts and encourage our colleagues to do the same. Remember, recruiting and marketing our profession does not mean that dental schools would increase their class sizes. To the contrary, most schools are decreasing class sizes. However, dental school admission committees wish to increase the applicant pool so that there will be an opportunity to select the most highly qualified young men and women to take our place in practice and education in the years ahead.

In recruiting, we must strive continually to improve the image of dentistry and indicate that it is more than a profession that "drills on teeth." The members of our profession are in the top 1% of income-earners in the United States. Although there has been a dramatic decline in the dental needs of young individuals, the same reduction has not been observed in the older population. The rapidly increasing older population and the large increase in the "with teeth population" until the year 2000 and beyond will expand the need for dental care, and with intensified dental health education there will be a rising demand for dental care.

Dental educators long have recognized that the best recruiter for the dental applicant is the family dentist. Pediatric dentists see children at a young age and can begin to develop in these children an interest in dentistry as a future profession. By the time a student enters high school, he or she already may have decided on a profession, so early recruitment is very important.

A recent article pointed out that in the

advertising profession it is recognized that clients will tell only two people, on the average, how good they think your office is and that those two people in turn will tell an average of two people each, for a total of six. This is known as the Rule of Six. However, experts also claim that a dissatisfied patient will tell an average of 15 people how bad he thinks your office is and that each of these people will tell another 15 individuals for a total of 225

people. This is known as the Rule of 225. Thus, we should realize that the negative comments about our profession can "turn off" young people that might otherwise have had an interest in pursuing a dental education.

Now is the time to be positive about our profession when we have an opportunity to influence young people who are deciding on a career.

Malcolm E. McDonald

Quotable quote: the great pH controversy

Pepsodent is mildly acid, to comply with requirement of modern authorities.
Mild acid increases the flow and fluidity of the saliva, to better wash the teeth.
It increases the alkalinity of the saliva, to better neutralize mouth acids.
It increases the ptyalin in the saliva, to better digest starch deposits.
It acts to curdle fresh mucin plaque, and to disintegrate it at any stage of formation.
Anything alkaline has just the opposite effect. It sacrifices these desirable results for a momentary alkalinity.

The cause of dental decay: the presence in the mouth of lactic and butyric acids formed by bacterial action on food particles.

How to prevent dental decay: The daily, systematic application of a suitable, nonirritating, nonabrasive alkaline fluid is the best and most practical method of controlling or preventing dental decay. This is not an empty assertion, but it has the support of authority.

Note: thousands of your fellow practitioners have made the discovery that "Phillips' Milk of Magnesia" is just such a fluid. It completely fills the bill. It is the ideal alkalizer for use in the human mouth.

Advertisements from The Journal of the American Dental Association. October, 1924