

Perspectives

US AIR FORCE DENTAL INVESTIGATION SERVICE: A "HIDDEN GEM!"

Accessing reliable, evidence-based dental information untainted from commercial bias is difficult today owing to the many commercial influences on both speakers and the print media. Because of the cost-free, largely unsolicited nature of dental tabloids, these magazines have become an ever-pervasive source of information for the dentist. They are interesting vehicles for largely commercial information intended to catch the eye of today's dental consumers; however, the articles contained therein should not be considered reliable references for unbiased, valid assessments of products or techniques. Nonetheless, these tabloids are fun to peruse and keep us all up to date regarding what's new and available.

Synoptic publications such as the *CRA Newsletter*, *Dental Advisor*, and *Reality* also are popular sources of information because the data rendered are both timely and practical. All three provide valuable information regarding the latest products and techniques, along with subjective evaluations of performance. In particular, the *CRA Newsletter*, the oldest of these types of publications, has enjoyed wide readership and acceptance among practitioners. Founded by

Drs. Gordon and Rella Christensen, the CRA was started with the primary intent of establishing a network of clinicians through whose experiences new products and techniques could be evaluated in a real-world clinical setting. Today this publication blends these practitioner-based evaluations with well-controlled, in-house, in vitro studies in an effort to provide the latest clinically practical information to the dental consumer.

Each of these synoptic publications serves as a valuable adjunct to the peer-reviewed literature because each provides timely information on new products available in the marketplace. Although the recommendations are not necessarily absolute, they nonetheless provide a largely subjective assessment of qualities and perceived performance. However, the major drawback with all of these synoptic publications is that they understandably require a paid subscription to access the information on a regular basis.

What most dentists may not realize is that there exists an additional source of dental information that is a real "hidden gem"—the US Air Force Dental Investigation Service (DIS) (see <www.brooks.af.mil/dis/>). This impressive service is

one of the most comprehensive sources of up-to-date information on contemporary dental materials and devices available in dentistry. And what's most attractive is that the DIS is not beholden to any company or commercial influence. It is largely unbiased, and access is *free*!

The DIS was established in 1976 to provide the government with unbiased evaluations of dental products to facilitate purchasing decisions by the federal government. This service provides not only valuable, comprehensive, and objective evaluations of dental products but also multiple links to studies the DIS and others have conducted related to these products. The evaluations are exceptionally well presented and include well-organized product profiles titled "In a Nutshell," along with recommendations and a bottom line for each product evaluated. Product profiles also are augmented with beautiful color illustrations of the product being evaluated.

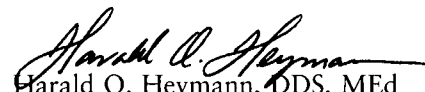


The DIS has enjoyed a distinguished history, and yet the civilian dental profession has largely been oblivious to its existence. Past heads of the DIS have included notable dental researchers Dr. Carl Haveman, associate professor, Department of General Dentistry, University of Texas Health Sciences Center at San Antonio; Dr. Ken Stoffers, clinical associate professor, Department of Cariology, Restorative Sciences and Endodontics, University of Michigan Dental School; and Dr. Tom Hilton, Alumni Centennial Professor of Operative Dentistry at the Oregon Health and Sciences University

School of Dentistry. The current chief of the DIS is Dr. (Col) Nicholas Miniotis. DIS researchers regularly present their findings at the American and International Associations of Dental Research and publish their work in peer-reviewed journals. Their staff includes an impressive cadre of experts in dental materials, infection control, facility design, and equipment evaluations.

I have high regard for the work that has been done by the DIS over the years. Although the DIS has been successful in disseminating objective information to the federal dental

services, it has gone largely unnoticed by the dental profession. I highly recommend that dentists take a look at this invaluable, unbiased, free resource for dental information. It is high time that dentistry take note of this hidden gem!


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