

# Perspectives

## THE ETHICS QUESTION—A CLOSER LOOK

Having been recently part of two ethics workshops, I feel compelled to discuss with you the ethical dilemma that engages us in dentistry today. The first event was sponsored by the American College of Dentists at the ADA Building in Chicago. For that one, I stayed an extra 4 days in Chicago after my normal week of involvement with the AES, Chicago Dental Society and Restorative Academy. The second event was associated with the ADEA in Orlando. Both were thought provoking and stimulating, and they brought The Pankey Institute into clear focus as the unique CE provider with a renowned reputation for ethical and professional practices. These practices govern our teaching and how The Pankey Institute performs and interacts as an organization.

Every constituent should be extremely proud of the comments lavished upon your Institute in both these workshops. In fact, we were used as a role model for ultimate ethical practices. This goes, of course, back to our roots and humble beginnings. The basis for The Pankey Institute is enriched by the ethical professionalism demanded by our founders and namesake. For

the last 24 years, Chris Sager and I have continually made decisions solely based on what was best for the Institute and what would be the correct thing to do. Literally, every other dental organization can take notice of the practices that guide your Institute.

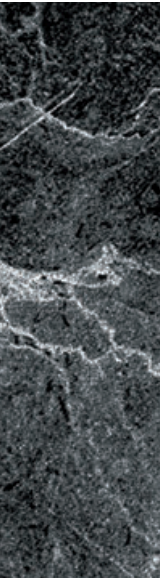
So what are the essential problems raging in our profession and what do we do that has become a shining beacon for others? Commercialism is increasingly influencing dentistry and continuing dental education. We are philosophically (ethically) opposed to this. We stress that each and every treatment plan must solely and purposely be in the patient's best interest; and we separate and guard the Institute from commercial influence in our continuing dental education program.

Today we see too many shortcuts being taken during the examination and diagnosis of patients' problems, and these shortcuts lead to quick-fix answers to otherwise complex and sophisticated problems. Surely, the public has been dazzled by the marketing blitz of "extreme makeovers" and product-driven treatment solutions. These solutions are notoriously oversimplified just

to market a particular product or product line. We even are beginning to see corporate pressure to misdirect who should be accomplishing and performing the most complex and difficult procedures.

I particularly worry about any movement that erodes the time-proven benefits of the team approach to interdisciplinary dentistry. You know about my commitment to developing general dentists into restorative dentists, yet there are levels of complications that are best treated by specialists within the framework of interdisciplinary diagnostics and team communication and cooperation. In the long term, I would be leery of any movement that could eventually erode the overall concept of comprehensive care.

In addition, the ugly truth is that licensure credits can be obtained through infomercial-type educational programs. It seems only right that a properly accredited program



should present a broad perspective on a given subject and not present only one product, with only that one product's own research being quoted. How can the demonstration of a particular commercial product be worthy of credit granting?

The problem started out small but has grown to major proportions, even at the dental-school level. We clearly realize the problem that school-based CE programs have in sustaining themselves without corporate sponsorship. We realize that there clearly can exist a healthy and ethical relationship with the corporate world. However, just as we have existed all these years by tuition sustaining our programs, there must be proper ways to conduct the business of dental education.

As you know and as you must be proud of, we pay for everything we have here at Pankey. We are clean when it comes to any conflict that could lead to any type of bias in our teaching. For example, if we are discussing implants, we can talk about any brand or any company's advantages or disadvantages. In fact, our curriculum is based on principles and practices, not instrumentation, product, or even specific technique.

We can work closely with corporations and put on programs together, but it is always with the clear understanding that we have complete freedom to say anything we want. We have pure disclosure and have no financial obligations that could lead to ethical questions. If other CE providers did not feel they had to be subsidized or financially sponsored by corporations, dentistry would not be in this dilemma.

I support the good things that the corporate world has done for and with dentistry. I support their ethical research and development. I simply ask that as a profession, we insist on ethical practices when dealing with the corporate world. These would include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. pure and clear disclosures
2. arms-length financial dealings between the corporate world and dental schools and CE programs
3. no credit granting for single-product courses
4. honest disclosure when comprehensive care is being short-changed (eg, instant orthodontics, utilizing veneers when orthodontics is more appropriate)
5. withdrawal of corporate support for CE programs that are not

ethically based, promote gross overtreatment, and/or utilize principles that are not part of the generally accepted guidelines of dental schools and the respected professional organizations and academies of organized dentistry

6. withdrawal of organized dentistry's support for those few CE providers that offer quasi-degrees that are not universally recognized for their merit or credibility
7. complete disclosure when utilizing case studies that in any manner were laboratory- or corporately subsidized so the audience is not misled about what is possible utilizing fee-for-service dental care

It all seems so easy if all of us just did the right thing.

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