

Perspectives

THE NEW DIRECTION IN DENTAL CONTINUING EDUCATION

During my career, continuing education (CE) has changed remarkably. Many years ago, most of the relatively sparse CE courses were offered in dental schools or in private study clubs, most of which were organized to provide information, enhance the clinical skills of members with hands-on clinical experience, and develop fellowship among dentists of similar interests. The dental school courses were usually taught by faculty members, and the study clubs had a variety of mentors, usually dentists with known knowledge and skills in the respective areas of study club interest. During these years, most dentists felt relatively competent in their dental skills upon graduation from dental school. The amount of information available in dentistry was a small fraction of the information in the profession today.

As travel became easier and as information continued to expand in the profession, CE instructors were recruited by CE directors from geographic locations remote from the sites of instruction. Schools started more aggressive CE programs; dental societies sponsored more well-known speakers to come to their

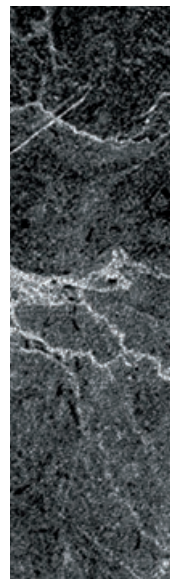
areas to attract dentists to dental society meetings. The expansion of information and techniques in dentistry began to make graduation from dental school appear to only be a minimal start for a neophyte dentist on a long journey of CE.

Currently, dental students are graduating from dental school with basic information about the profession and the necessary techniques to practice rudimentary dentistry, but many students could use more education and training in numerous areas, such as esthetic dentistry, implant dentistry, occlusion, high-technology concepts, computer-aided design/computer-aided manufacture, and practice administration, to name a few. This comment is not in any way critical of dental schools and their over-worked faculty members. There is just too much to teach in the short few years of dental school.

Many private postdoctoral educational "schools," "academies," and "institutes" have started across the country. Most of these organizations teach specific subjects or concepts only. Some provide excellent in-depth CE, are highly respected, and have been completely honest

and ethical in their orientation. Others have not had these characteristics and are primarily commercially oriented.

I have watched the evolution of CE over the various stages described previously, having provided over 45,000 hours of CE myself throughout the world. Much of the CE I provide is for recent graduates, interns, and residents, or junior and senior dental students. Further, I had the opportunity and privilege early in my career to be a full-time dental educator for about one-third of my career to date. With this experience and my observations of the state of knowledge among recent dental graduates and mature dentists, I have concluded that many dentists in both groups have significant gaps in their knowledge relative to the continually expanding information in the profession. Anyone familiar with the wide range of CE can identify those areas of needed education.



The need is extremely evident for an overall CE organization that provides several levels of dental education in all areas of dentistry, ranging from lectures to seminars, to hands-on courses, to videos, and to Web orientation. Such an organization should assist in determining the educational deficiencies of individual dentists and organizing a CE curriculum that satisfies the needs and desires of the practitioners.

This type of complete dental CE is now becoming a reality. I have been asked to lead the educational activities of the Scottsdale Center for Dentistry in Arizona in addition to some of my responsibilities in Utah. The Center will include at least 18 integrated departments, chaired by well-known CE instructors, with a group of recognized faculty teaching in each area. The instructors are now being recruited using the following criteria:

1. excellent teaching ability
2. up-to-date knowledge in his or her area
3. maturity in their respective teaching area

4. ability to teach dental information applicable to the general population, not only to the wealthy few
5. reputation for providing pragmatic, easily applied information
6. known clinical expertise or expertise in their respective nonclinical area
7. no commercial commitments to companies
8. honest
9. previous or current financial success as a clinician in his or her respective area

Yes, such individuals do exist, and you know them and seek them out for their individual courses. The Scottsdale Center will integrate them into a broad curriculum.

The over-50-million-dollar Center is already built and functional, and some courses are already being delivered. The year 2007 will be one of organization, recruiting faculty, and getting every aspect of the Center functional. It is anticipated that near-full operation will be realized in early 2008. The operation of the Center will not be funded by

companies and it will not solicit company financial participation. It will support itself by providing excellent CE at a moderate cost to participants.

What should we expect as the next evolutionary step in dental CE? There needs to be a place where postdoctoral education can be delivered and experienced with a comprehensive and integrated approach to the CE needs of *all* dentists. Most importantly, this education should serve the needs and desires of *all* levels of patients, not just the privileged few. It is logical that dental CE will continue to expand, mature, and fill the gaps evident in the education of dentists, dental hygienists, assistants, and technicians. *The future looks very bright for CE!*

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