

Philanthropy and Prosthodontics

AS I PREPARE to leave the Board of Directors of the American College of Prosthodontists, I have spent some time looking back on the ten years I served the ACP in various capacities. Lately, I've reviewed my experiences over this period and have tried to identify the most significant accomplishments during my years with the College. One of my most gratifying experiences was the successful fundraising campaign to create an endowment for the ACP Education and Research Foundation.

At our 2000 annual session in Hawaii I recall being in a conference room with the Board of the ACP Education and Research Foundation. At the time we had less than \$20,000 in assets, and President Elect Tom McGarry challenged each member of the Board to pledge a substantial contribution to the ACPEF. Each member of the Board agreed to a five-year financial commitment, and even though we didn't know it at the time, our capital campaign was born. The enthusiasm in the room spread to the rest of the meeting, and we left Hawaii a few days later with more than \$100,000 in pledges.

During the ensuing months, the ACPEF Board hired a campaign consulting firm, and after an extensive period of research and organization we embarked upon a \$2 million capital campaign, *The New Vision Campaign*. Within a few months, through the work of many people, we launched our \$2 million New Vision Campaign at the 2001 Annual Session with an unprecedented \$2.2 million pledged. Although we had no prior history of successful fundraising, our early success and enthusiasm convinced our consultants to allow us to raise the goal to \$5 million.

Many people worked very hard on this first significant fundraising effort for the College and many individuals and corporations made generous

contributions to the campaign. At the November 2002 Annual Session, the New Vision Campaign was significantly shy of its goal. It appeared that we would never meet our goal, but a major last minute effort enabled us to conclude the campaign with over \$5 million pledged. At the President's Reception people accused me of locking the doors so no one could leave until we had met our goal! Our success was considered nothing short of amazing. No one would have predicted that an organization with no history of past development success and a membership without a heritage of successful annual campaigns could have raised that amount of money. What was the explanation? Analysis revealed that our corporate supporters provided the majority of the support while only 12% of our membership pledged gifts to the campaign.

Since that time I have learned a bit about development. I learned that we challenged the conventional wisdom of fundraising. Most development professionals would advise a not-for-profit organization like ours to create an annual appeal deriving a significant portion of its support from its membership. Most experts on development advocate launching a capital campaign after the creation of a successful annual fund. In most organizations the annual fund precedes a capital campaign. Annual funds provide ongoing support for staff, facilities, and funding while capital campaigns are infrequent events in the history of organizations, occurring approximately every 7–10 years. They usually are created to fund some special project: a new building for a college, a new program for a medical center, or a new wing for a museum. We used our capital campaign to “jump start” our foundation. Prospective donors for capital campaigns are usually identified by their giving history over the

course of many annual fund appeals. It is no wonder our consultants seriously doubted our ability to raise money and initially established the goal of the campaign at a modest \$2 million.

As the leadership of the College and Foundation has passed to others, I was recently asked by Len Kobren, chair of the Foundation development committee, to consider a gift to the annual campaign. My response was that I was still in my five-year period of pledge payment, and since we are “rolling in money” why are you asking members to contribute to an annual appeal? As I began to listen to Len’s explanation, I realized two things. First, we had skipped a major first step when we launched the New Vision Campaign: the annual appeal. Secondly, we were not exactly “rolling in money.”

Current Foundation policy stipulates that 40%, or \$2 million, of the funds pledged be set aside for an endowment. An additional 40% will be used to fund current initiatives, e.g., the scholarships to graduate students, support for last Spring’s ADEA Educators Conference and the public awareness initiative, to name a few. The remaining 20% is used to cover Foundation overhead and Board directed activities. Last year the Foundation gave away approximately \$400,000 in grants. At the end of the five-year redemption period the endowment will be approximately \$2 million and will generate approximately \$100,000 in income. That means that in order to continue funding specialty initiatives after the five-year period has expired we will have to develop other sources of funding. The most likely source of that funding will have to be the ACPEF Annual Appeal. We will need to generate at least \$300,000 per year to keep funding at current levels. Will we succeed?

As an organization we face many hurdles in establishing an annual fund that brings in sufficient funds for our much needed programs. Firstly, dentists in general and Prosthodontists in particular do not have a heritage of philanthropy. Raising the awareness of the need for and the responsibility of philanthropy amongst our members is going to be a tremendous challenge. I met a practice management consultant recently and the discussion of dentist giving came up. The question was asked: “Do dentists not give much

money to charity in general, or, are they serious philanthropists but just don’t give to their dental schools?” He replied by saying that he sees the tax returns of a great number of dentist clients and they don’t discriminate against their schools, they just don’t give much to charity in general, on average less than 1% of their income. Secondly, some specialty organizations have contribution rates in excess of 60%. If we are to be successful attracting additional corporate support in the future we must grow our participation rate from the 15% participation we currently have to over 50%, at least.

We Prosthodontists owe a large debt of gratitude to our dental schools, graduate programs and specialty organization. A recent private practice fee survey shows that Prosthodontists earn significantly more than our general practice colleagues. Do we not have a responsibility to give back to our profession? The Old Testament refers to the concept of tithing, giving a tenth of one’s income back to the institutions and systems that have supported you. Fulfilling this responsibility would bring benefits to the giver – first, the sense of personal satisfaction that comes with generosity and second, the assurance of long term support from their revered institutions. I certainly am not suggesting that we should be obligated to give ten percent of our income to the ACPEF. However, the spirit of that concept can motivate more of us to give in amounts that would have real impact.

Investing in our educational programs and our research endeavors benefits all of us. We need more of the best and brightest students in our programs, more prosthodontic educators and researchers and more people in private practice. Those of us in private practice need a healthy educational system as well. Sixty-five percent of our membership is in private practice and they will need associates and, eventually partners to buy their practices. We are all in this together. I urge you to support the ACPEF Annual Fund, whether you gave to the New Vision Campaign or not. The future of Prosthodontics depends on it.

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