## **Guest Editorial Prosthodontics in Mainstream Culture**

MEDICAL TELEVISION dramas expose Americans to medical problems and diseases. Finally, due to cutting edge research, Prosthodontics is becoming part of this phenomenon. More importantly, Prosthodontics has finally been shown in an accurate and positive light, thanks to the research of Shonda Rimes, creator and executive producer of the TV medical drama "Grey's Anatomy." The 2007 season finale of "Grey's," entitled "Didn't We Almost Have it All," received the highest ratings for that evening, and Prosthodontics was part of the big show!

"Viewers get a lot of health information from TV shows. That's why we want to work with the writers to make sure it's accurate," says Vicki Beck, Director of Hollywood, Health & Society (HH&S) at USC Annenberg's Norman Lear Center. HH&S is a government project that provides entertainment industry professionals with accurate and timely information for health storylines.<sup>1</sup> This project, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Cancer Institute, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the Health Resources Services Administration Division of Transplantation, recognizes that entertainment media have a profound impact on personal behavior, and therefore is an untapped, fun way to present accurate medical information. The project offers resources such as story consulting, expert interviews, fact sheets, and a list of tip sheets written specifically for writers and producers. An analysis of data from a 2001 survey by Porter Novelli, a public relations firm, found that over 50% of viewers learn something about a disease from daytime or primetime television dramas.<sup>1</sup> This fact caught the attention of the CDC, government health officials, advocacy groups, and academic medical professionals, who all saw an opportunity to get medical information to millions of viewers. The group has fielded more than 400 requests from TV shows in the past two years.

Twenty-one million, five hundred thousand (that's 21,500,000) Americans watched the season finale of "Grey's Anatomy" on May 17, 2007, according to Nielsen Media Research. "Grey's Anatomy" features the lives and complicated relationships of five bright surgical interns at Seattle Grace Hospital. The gripping realism of their personal lives is second only to the informative realism of the medical information the show's viewers are passively exposed to while watching the show. I confess that as a "Grey's Anatomy" addict, I know each character's life story and professional history, not to mention the personality flaws that make the character development in the show so real.

What is so significant about this season's finale? The word "Prosthodontist" was used correctly and in a positive light by a major character-twice! The scene that featured our specialty highlights a formerly pregnant and amnesic (of coursewhat else?!) trauma victim who has undergone significant facial reconstruction to make her whole again. The facial reconstruction has brought Rebecca (yes she recovered her memory!) the selfrespect and confidence she lost when she was physically unrecognizable to herself or family. As she is about to be discharged, she utters the wonderful phrase, "My teeth got the blessing from the Prosthodontist." Rebecca did not say "Plastic Surgeon." She did not say "dentist." Rebecca said "Prosthodontist!" It was clear to us in dentistry, but most importantly in the Prosthodontic Specialty, that Rebecca, as a part of her traumatic injury, had a problem with her mouth that required the services of a Prosthodontist. Her injuries were so significant that she required the Prosthodontic specialist to work with the plastic surgeon, Dr. Mark Sloan, and the OBGYN, Dr. Addison Montgomery-Shepherd. The significance of this entire show is that a Prosthodontist was portrayed as part of the medical team!

The research for this episode was done accurately and outstandingly. Elizabeth Klaviter is the director of medical research for "Grey's," and she has a physician on the writing staff who often seeks help from outside experts. Perhaps only a Prosthodontist can appreciate the fact that this trauma victim required a Prosthodontist to be part of the medical team to make the patient whole again. That is what we as Prosthodontists do! It's a specialty that is critically important in complex restorative dental treatment, especially in head and neck cancer and trauma. But until now, the specialty has not been recognized by the general public.

Finally, the specialty of Prosthodontics has been placed on the proverbial map by a highly popular TV medical drama! We are finally a part of the mainstream! That "Prosthodontist" (at least the word) was part of the 2007 season finale of "Grey's Anatomy" is probably due in part to a little known project (HH&S) with the goal of getting the medical/dental part of medical TV shows right. I look forward to the day when I say "Prosthodontist" and that word is as recognizable as "Orthodontist." Or when I tell someone what I do for a living, and they understand what I do!

The ACP had a very elaborate and expensive publicity campaign to educate the public about our specialty. On May 17, 2007, the word Prosthodontist got out to the 21.5 million people watching "Grey's Anatomy." ACP just got a publicity boast with no cost attached. I hope all 21.5 million Americans were listening closely to the scene when Rebecca uttered the word "Prosthodontist." But even if *they* weren't, *I* will be playing that clip in my office for the next year!

(Log onto http://abc.go.com/primetime/greysa natomy/index to see the season finale.)

Sharon Crane Siegel, DDS, MS Clinical Reports Section Editor Journal of Prosthodontics Chair, Dept. of Prosthodontics Nova Southeastern University Fort Lauderdale, FL

## Reference

 Richwine L: Health experts help TV docs get facts straight. Yahoo News. http://news.yahoo.coms/nm/20070525/hl\_nm/ usa\_health\_tv\_dc. Copyright of Journal of Prosthodontics is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.