

Wake Up, People!

While not a fan of most soft drinks, I am intrigued by the recent commercials from Diet Pepsi Max[®] showing people falling asleep in various situations—eating in a restaurant, doing a sports promotion, standing beside the water cooler—you get the picture. Viewing these, I am reminded of how many times I have heard our members complain about how Prosthodontics, as a discipline and a Specialty, has missed opportunities to assume leadership roles (nay, to take outright ownership of) various entities—esthetics, dental implant therapy, and evidence-based dentistry, to cite the most recent ones. We've been accused of idly standing by while others assumed leadership positions (became the “experts”) in areas our Specialty has developed and promoted for years. Additionally, our members continue to ask, “What is the ACP (and other Prosthodontic organizations) doing to put patients in my chair?” “Where are our inserts in USA Today, like the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons have had?” “Where did my \$100 assessment for public relations on my annual dues go?” “Where are the patients?”

I have long been an advocate of our organization promoting itself at the national level through advocacy—in the American Dental Association, the American Dental Education Association, and through the Prosthodontic Forum. However, I am saddened to say that I do not see the ADA promoting the nine recognized dental specialties above the interests of general dentists (after all, general dentists comprise over 80% of the ADA's membership), or ADEA promoting any group other than the dental schools, or the Prosthodontics Forum working collaboratively to promote the Specialty (they have their own interests and agendas to worry about). What I have seen over the past decade is the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) becoming a strong advocate of children's oral health, with repeated representation before Congress, their collaboration with the ADA on “Give Kids a Smile” programs, and passage of the SCHIP (State's Children's Health Insurance Program) program through Congress on February 9, 2009.

The AAPD has figured out their advocacy role in shaping the future of dentistry for children in the US. Have we?

Take for instance, the fact that we completely missed out on the “Healthy People 2010” initiatives, and we're on the verge of similarly missing out on “Healthy People 2020.” If you are not aware, the “Healthy People” program has been around since 1979. According to their website (healthypeople.gov/HP2020/default.asp), “Every ten years, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provides science-based, 10-year national objectives for promoting health and preventing disease. Since 1979, Healthy People has set and monitored national health objectives to meet a broad range of health needs, encourage collaborations across sectors, guide individuals toward making informed health decisions, and measure the impact of our prevention activity . . . [DHHS] leverages scientific insights and lessons learned from the past decade, along with new knowledge of current data, trends, and innovations. Healthy People 2020 will reflect assessments of major risks to health and wellness, changing public health priorities, and emerging issues related to our nation's health preparedness and prevention.”

Is there a group of patients who deserve our advocacy more than the edentulous patient population? Unfortunately, Prosthodontics has not been involved in these initiatives, and the 12th (yes, 12th) regional advisory committee meeting was held in Bethesda, MD on May 28th. It appears that our only input may come from the “public comment” section, which has been open since 2008, and now is only available online. To make comments, you can go to their website (see above), click on the “Public Comment” box on the left side of the screen, go to the link at the bottom of that page to “create a profile,” register, and make your comments. If you want to make Prosthodontics known to others (after all, is that not the very best form of PR?), become an advocate for your specialty organization—join the Healthy People 2020 initiative, and make a difference! It really is time to WAKE UP, PEOPLE!

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