

Prosthodontic Education—Competency and Proficiency—Giving Away *Part* of the Farm

To the Editor:

We read with real interest Dr. Felton's editorial provocatively entitled "Giving Away the Farm." The editorial was an informative personal perspective on the American College of Prosthodontists (ACP) and continuing dental education (CE). In addition, the editorial posed several thought-provoking questions about the role of the ACP Center for Prosthodontic Education (CPE) in CE. We definitely believe the ACP needs to play an active role in prosthodontic education at all levels: predoctoral education, postdoctoral education, and CE for both general dentists and for dental specialists.

Dr. Felton mentions partnering with the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD). If joining forces with the AGD can strengthen the ACP, the specialty of prosthodontics, the discipline of prosthodontics, and continuing education in prosthodontics, we are all for it. However, we believe that clarification is in order.

Let us reconsider the three issues presented by Dr. Felton in the editorial. Dr. Felton presents manpower as the first issue. Clearly, the ACP, with 2500 practicing members, cannot treat all the completely edentulous, partially edentulous, or the Prosthodontic Diagnostic Index Class III or Class IV patients in North America.

The second issue raised by Dr. Felton, the ADA's recent private practice survey indicating that 49% of all services provided by their membership were prosthodontic related, should come as no surprise to anyone in dental practice. General dentists must and do perform a significant portion of prosthodontic care. We agree with Dr. Felton that access to prosthodontic care is a major issue confronting the dental profession and will become even more important in the future.

The third issue raised by Dr. Felton is a more delicate one: the knowledge, skills, and values of graduating dental students. Dr. Felton states that "There is not a single dental school in the United States that trains any graduating predoctoral dental student to a level of competency in removable prosthodontics and implant prosthodontics or full mouth reconstruction—not one." While we can appreciate the provocative nature of this bold statement, we believe it deserves further consideration. For many years, dental schools have relied on competency statements to address curriculum issues, promotion, and graduation standards as well as accreditation standards. We should take a closer look at how the word "competent" is defined.

Both the Commission on Dental Accreditation and the American Dental Education Association define competency as the knowledge, skills, and values required to perform a complex behavior or ability essential for the general dentist to begin independent, unsupervised dental practice. Competency assumes that all behaviors and skills are performed with a degree of

quality consistent with patient well-being and that the new general dentist can self-evaluate treatment effectiveness. By this definition, competency does not assume that the new general dentist possesses the experience, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and technical and procedural skills necessary to treat patients with significant restorative needs. We agree with Dr. Felton that graduating dental students do not possess the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to treat "all" prosthodontic patients.

As prosthodontists, we have the advantage of additional formal training that allows us to develop a level of proficiency through in-depth additional knowledge, critical analysis, and expertise. This level of clinical proficiency is what we aspire for our dental students to attain, but their dental school education is too limited. Competency-based predoctoral dental education is trying to graduate competent general dentists not specialists.

We will conclude by addressing Dr. Felton's concern about "Giving Away the Farm." As members of the ACP, we are interested and even enthusiastic about predoctoral prosthodontic education, prosthodontic continuing education for both the general dentist practicing the discipline of prosthodontics, and for the prosthodontist practicing the specialty. However, we must be practical with our financial resources by leveraging the expertise available through our members.

The ACP must be active in prosthodontic education at all levels. ACP members are outstanding academicians at dental schools teaching young dental learners to become new graduates competent in prosthodontics. ACP members are directors of excellent prosthodontic postdoctoral programs teaching proficiency and matriculating highly qualified new prosthodontists. ACP members are "master educators" teaching state-of-the-art research, materials, and techniques in prosthodontic continuing education courses to generalists and prosthodontists. The ACP can continue to be vigilant with its resources and strengthen prosthodontic education and may consider "Giving Away *Part* of the Farm."

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Felton for his leadership and service to the ACP as a past president and now as editor of the *Journal of Prosthodontics*. Thank you, Dave, for all that you do for the College and for this opportunity to share our thoughts regarding the important issue of CE for the ACP.

Richard R. Seals Jr., DDS, MEd, MS

John D. Jones, DDS

University of Texas Health Science Center
at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX

Copyright of Journal of Prosthodontics is the property of Wiley-Blackwell 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.