What price education?

Much has been written about the faculty shortage in orthodontic education. Lack of money is the principal cause. But how can more money be brought into the educational system?

The orthodontic community should know the answer to this question the best. Orthodontics is a fee-forservice business. The practicing orthodontist gets paid for overhead + profit. It would be impossible to stay in business if the orthodontist charged less than the cost of treatment. This is simple. But what is the cost of education?

Cost of education could be calculated in many different ways. Universities do it one way, the state does it another and the lucky parents who pay the bills have their own system. An orthodontic chairman may calculate the cost of education based on donations, clinic income, and budget allocation from the university vs., expenditures. Typically, donations are thought as alumni checks, brackets and wires given to the department, clinic income and university budget are self explanatory. Expenses, however, are more complex: donation is an expense item.

Faculty-time donations are the most significant. Notwithstanding the wide variation, a part-time faculty member who is successful in practice loses significant income by teaching school albeit, willingly. Let us reasonably assume that a regular attending comes to the department 2 days/week. Instead of teaching if this clinician were to stay in his/her successful practice and work, s/he stands to make another \$100 000/year. Typically, a graduate program would have about 12 part-time attendings. Thus, the monetary value of clinical education from these individuals is 1.2 million dollars. If a graduate program is 30 months long, then the students have bought \$3 000 000 worth of education. Additionally, the full-time faculty in a career span of 35 years probably loses about \$5 000 000. On top of these figures, the cost of clinic construction, supplies, maintenance, insurance, and the like must be added. Thus, the total dollar amount of orthodontic education is over \$10 000 000 in each department. As much as these are 'ballpark' figures, the cost of education is substantial. In return, the residents pay tuition and buy instruments and equipment to the tune of say, \$100 000. This figure is 0.1% of the cost of their education.

Now we have the figures, what do we do? How do we reap the equity on the deposit that today's teachers are paying forward.

Clearly, no one resident can afford to pay the actual cost of their education on demand. But we all buy homes way beyond our annual income. Is there a reason why orthodontic education could not be mortgaged?

> Orhan C. Tuncay, DMD Editor-in-Chief

Copyright of Orthodontics & Craniofacial Research 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.