

# Guest Editorial

## Regifting Ourselves

Paul Casamassimo, DDS, MS

About 10 years ago, I wrote an editorial in *Pediatric Dentistry* entitled, "The Gift." In it, I paid tribute to the parents of children with special health care needs and to my colleagues in pediatric dentistry who received an intangible gift from these parents and dedicated a part of their practice lives to caring for these children and adults.<sup>1</sup>

Last November, at the Academy-sponsored symposium on patients with special health care needs, I was regifted. In this issue, you will find the papers and workshop reports of this conference. I hope you will read and learn from them.

Old Testament wisdom<sup>2</sup> states that "a gift puts one in the presence of giants." At this conference, I was among them. Several presenters were parents of children with special health care needs (SHCN) and also were dentists. They mesmerized us with their reflections on life from both sides of the dental chair, alternately eliciting our anger and tears at what they had experienced. We also heard from colleagues who could best be described as Davids rather than the giant Goliath. They had taken on the educational and dental care systems on behalf of SHCN patients, risking and experiencing their wrath. The audience was also filled with many giants-at-heart whose day-to-day practices share the gift of caring with those with SHCN.

The gift I received during these two days is both heartening and chilling. It is one of awareness of how far we have come yet how far we as a profession need to go. The presentations and side conversations at the symposium revealed a group of gifted dental professionals whose knowledge and daily use of interpersonal communication, neuromuscular and psychological theory, social networks, and understanding of health care systems place them on a level far above most of their profession. Sadly, these same observations revealed how far the dental profession needs to come to render quality dental care to the nearly 20% of people who have a disability.

I was heartened when several speakers reminded me that receiving "the gift" is all that any dental practitioner really needs to care for most SHCN patients. Most patients can be cared for with traditionally educated heads and dentally skilled hands, if the heart is willing.

We have a long way to go to ensure care for all people, with and without disabilities. Our dental educational system cannot deny our students training in the care of SHCN patients, as much as they can't deny them experiences treating people of color. Yet, it does. Our care financing mechanisms can't deny coverage to these patients and their caregivers. Yet, they do. Dental care providers can't continue to turn these patients away for reasons that are unfounded and capricious. Yet, we do.

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry members can be proud of the steps taken during this conference to identify the issues preventing care of persons with disabilities. The recommendations to address these issues will be passed on to our councils and decision-makers and translated into action in the legislative and dental education arenas. Our Academy has a strong record of taking oral health issues to power—and getting results.

Realize it or not, you've been gifted by your Academy with this symposium and this conference. You are part of a dental organization that advocates for all, with all it has. You can enjoy the gift of learning given to you in this issue. What's more, you can regift a patient with special needs right now.

### References

1. Casamassimo PS. The gift. *Pediatr Dent* 1996;18:270.
2. Proverbs 18:16. King James Bible.

Copyright of Pediatric Dentistry is the property of American Society of Dentistry for Children 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.