

Comments by Steve Corbin, DDS, MPH, Vice President for Professional Relations and Institutional Advancement, Oral Health America

It is indeed an honor to have been asked by Dr. and Mrs. Joseph M. Doherty—Joe and Helen, as so many of us have come to know them over the years—to participate in this wonderful occasion. The Dohertys are very special people to all of us—special of course by the things that they have done and contributions that they have made, but more so because of who they are. In the few minutes that have been allotted to me, I would like to share some personal reflections on my friendship with the Dohertys, hoping that many of you will see a mirror of some of your own experiences.

I have known the Dohertys for more than two decades, although I've known Joe a little longer than Helen. Back in 1976, when I first became a regional dental director for the Indian Health Service in Bemidji, Minnesota, my boss at the time, Dr. Richard Baker, at our first meeting said, you need to get down—virtually everything was down south from Bemidji—and meet Joe Doherty in Wisconsin. He is a sharp guy and runs a very good program. Joe had taken the initiative along with Bob Mecklenburg several years earlier to meet annually and bring in personnel from the different tribal programs in the Midwest to discuss oral health challenges and opportunities—a model for federal-state collaboration long before it was popularized in the "New Federalism."

As I remember, I traveled to Madison, Wisconsin, in the spring of 1977—at least what people in that part of the country call spring. Snowdrifts were piled up all over the middle of town. But then again, that was over two decades ago and there were so many snowdrifts during those years that they tend to run together. In the relatively short time that I worked with Joe back then, he taught me an amazing number of very important things. First, be as inclusive as possible. Public health solutions by definition involve people and, by necessity, include organizations, a variety of in-

terests, bureaucracies, and often politics. There is no way around dealing with all of the legitimate players—even the antis where fluoridation is involved. Prevention, treatment, and education are all essential to improving health. The private sector is not a tribulation to be borne by the public sector, but a critical partner in achieving public health goals—don't be insular in your thinking. Be a gentleperson in all of your dealings with others—why would you do otherwise? And, give something back to public health. As individuals we have been blessed by the opportunity to work in public health—to continually learn, to serve, and to see our efforts benefit others. That is no small reward.

Joe, I'll bet you didn't know all of the things that you were teaching, or maybe you are shocked that I could have learned so much. Joe's professional and personal actions over the many years that followed reinforced those early lessons—in short, he practiced what he preached and he was consistent.

It was clear to me from the outset that Dr. Doherty was a public health dentist's public health dentist. He had so integrated the science of public health dentistry with the practice of public health dentistry that the borders were indistinguishable. Joe was a strong supporter of community oral health programs for the Native Americans, and while relations between Native Americans and state government have not always been positive, Joe saw the growth of Native American health programs in his state as important and worthy of support.

But alas, Joe's time in Wisconsin was too short from my perspective, as he moved on to Virginia late in 1977 for his second stint in that state as a public health dentist. Again in 1984 I came into close contact with Joe as we planned the National Oral Health Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia, while I was the new director of the Dental Disease Prevention Activity at

CDC. Joe and his staff were so well prepared and committed that we pulled off an absolutely fantastic conference attended by nearly 300 people. That conference taught me both what was possible and what was needed at the national level and it served as a model in the years that followed for many additional excellent conferences. I still look at that conference as the birth of the National Oral Health Conference.

Not long thereafter, while Joe was serving on the American Board of Dental Public Health, he was the driving force behind the revision of the Behavioral Objectives in Dental Public Health—1986, I believe, was the year. With much commitment and enthusiasm and some creatively leveraged money from CDC, the behavioral objectives were revised and modernized, serving us all well for more than a decade. Joe was again involved with this process last year as, once again, revisions were made.

As a Washington, DC-based federal dentist for many years, I knew that I could count on Joe for input and personal involvement from a state perspective. I am sure that I abused his good will by too often assuming that he could just bop up from Richmond for some meeting that I was holding—often dealing with national health objectives or fluoridation. Joe never said no, never complained, and contributed mightily. One of Joe's favorite quotes was: "The Feds propose and the states dispose." I think this was his polite way of saying that actions speak louder than words.

I hope that everyone realizes the critical role that Joe and Helen played over many years in initially saving the American Association of Public Health Dentistry from demise and then helping it to become the first-class organization that it is today. Decisions that were made to turn over central administrative, including communications, functions to a private firm turned out to be disastrous for the as-

sociation. Nearly bankrupt, somewhat depressed and chagrined, a handful of the association's leaders pulled together to see if AAPHD's future could be salvaged. Not only has the association survived, it has thrived. Subsequent to the Dohertys' taking over the administrative functions for AAPHD, things immediately started smoothing out. Tasks got performed on time, people received timely, courteous responses to their inquiries, membership flourished, publications consistently improved, and our bank account moved more and more into the black. And all of this happened while the organization took on an increasingly complex national meeting, elevated the level of activity in the policy arena, and increased the quality and quantity of representation in national forums. I am not saying that all of this is due to Joe and Helen alone; but without Joe and Helen, none of this would have been possible. Just think of all the support work that was required through the many stages of reorganization activities and then the multi-year "Future of Dental Public Health Project."

Joe and Helen, though, gave more than their best efforts. They gave their hearts, souls, and a significant amount of their personal privacy to dental public health, and AAPHD in particular. By permitting their home, their garage, and their things to be used for our purposes, they gave more than anyone to what they believed in. We

have benefited greatly from this privilege and are not likely to see this level of commitment again very soon. Having recently left federal government and office space for a new home office environment, I can now appreciate what the Dohertys (mom and dad) sacrificed in terms of the sanctity of home being invaded by telephones, faxes, and delivery trucks.

In preparing these remarks a couple of weeks ago, I gave Joe a call just to confirm my recollection of the timing and sequence of some of the events in our relationship. Together we were able to reconstruct things pretty well. But Joe actually went all the way back to his beginnings in dental public health. They say that this is one of the first signs. Did you know that at one time Joe and Herschel Horowitz worked together in a dental clinic in the city of Detroit, over a three-month period? Can you imagine my embarrassment at realizing that it took 10 years for Hersch Horowitz to teach me everything I know about fluoride and Joe Doherty learned it in only 90 days?

I am naturally quite melancholy at this juncture. The idea of Joe and Helen not being there for us is quite daunting. But I earnestly wish you prosperity, long life, and fond memories of the times we all spent together. As busy professional people, and as the uptight, imperfect organisms that we all are, we generally fail to express those innermost, revealing thoughts that could let others know what we

feel about them.

Joe and Helen, I am sure that I speak for others and I know that I speak for myself in thanking you for your friendship and support. Over the years, renewing handshakes, acknowledging nods and smiles, a glass tipped on rare occasion, a few hugs, and a supportive arm thrown in when needed—I hope these add us in your hearts and minds as a great big thank you. Congratulations on this richly deserved recognition.

I want to close by reading some poetry that Joe Doherty composed a decade ago. He may have written others, but this is the only one that I know of. He wrote this on the occasion of the Virginia State Health Congress:

The importance of oral health in today's society, for the individual and the community, cannot be overemphasized. The mouth is intimately linked with four of the five bodily senses—taste, touch, smell, and hearing ... It is the portal for all bodily nourishment, without which we would cease to function. It serves as a vehicle for communication so crucial for interpersonal relationships. It serves as an expression of love and greetings through the kiss bestowed on the beloved and other persons welcomed. It provides each of us with improved self-esteem, for who can resist a beautiful smile or a healthy laugh?