

2003 AAPHD Special Merit Award: Donald A. Schneider, DDS, MPH

Presented by William R. Maas, DDS, MPH

The AAPHD Special Merit Award is presented for special meritorious service to public health dentistry. This year's recipient is Dr. Don Schneider. Dr. Schneider recently retired from the US Public Health Service after more than 28 years of service in its Commissioned Corps. His last assignment was as chief dental officer, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) (formerly the Health Care Financing Administration), where he functioned as the principal advisor to the agency on all matters concerning the oral health of beneficiaries of the Medicaid, Medicare, and State Children's Health Insurance Programs

(SCHIP).

The Special Merit Award is not an award for career achievement. Were I to review the list of responsible positions Dr. Schneider held in the Department of Health and Human Services and his many accomplishments, we could make the case to acknowledge career achievements. But I would like to leave that for some future recognition.

Not that a career achievement award couldn't be justified. As a diplomate of the American Board of Dental Public Health, Dr. Schneider has represented the specialty very well in both dental and nondental as-

signments. Throughout, he has demonstrated sound judgment, solid public health instincts and perspectives, impenetrable integrity, and besides all of that, he is simply a very hard worker. In 1997 he was clearly the very best person who could have been assigned to CMS to help that agency fulfill its very significant responsibilities for dental care for many of our nation's most vulnerable citizens.

The Special Merit Award is justified by an accomplishment with a simple measure, which represents inspired collaboration of individuals and associations dedicated to dentistry and social services all across the nation. For many years the proportion of enrolled Medicaid children who were able to obtain a dental visit remained at only about 20 to 21 percent. As the result of Dr. Schneider's efforts over just a few short but busy years, it appears that recent statistics reveal approximately a 5 percent increase in the proportion of children visiting the dentist.

To put that number in perspective, one needs to understand that there are about 20 million children enrolled in Medicaid—so, a 5 percent increase represents 1 million children. It is not likely that there is another person in the nation, certainly no other dental health professional, who is responsible for enabling so many children—1 million—to benefit from such an important experience.

Ironically, none of the 1 million children of this nation who are indebted to Dr. Schneider and his efforts know of him—neither do their parents. By leaving the clinic and specializing in dental public health, he has foregone the many, many "Thank you, doctor's" that our private sector colleagues receive every hour of every working day. So is the lot of the public health dental professional. Fortunately, though, there are quite a few leaders in the dental profession and public health community who do appreciate what Dr. Schneider has contributed



Drs. William R. Maas and Donald A. Schneider

It is particularly fitting that AAPHD members are joined at this National Oral Health Conference today by many state Medicaid dental program managers and consultants, as has been

the case for the past three years through Dr. Schneider's efforts. So, today we will say a collective, "Thank you, Dr. Schneider."

For special meritorious service to

public health dentistry, I am pleased to present the AAPHD Special Merit Award to Dr. Don Schneider.

Remarks on Receiving the 2003 AAPHD Special Merit Award

Donald A. Schneider, DDS, MPH

Thank you, Bill, for your kind remarks. It is always appreciated when one receives recognition; but this award has special meaning to me because it comes from the association of my peers and is received in the presence of my friends and colleagues, old and new. Thank you all.

I have found that it is generally the case that an accomplishment attributed to a single individual usually is the result of the hard work of many people. Increasing the number of Medicaid children receiving dental services clearly is no exception to this rule. In my view, the folks who have worked the hardest to improve dental access for Medicaid children are the people on the front lines—those at the

state and local level who, on a daily basis, seek ways to break down access barriers. Among those individuals who have faced the most difficulties in improving dental access for kids are the state Medicaid dental program managers. Their advocacy for children's dental access has produced dramatic results, although it has been unheralded and continues to occur within state governments often focused on concerns other than oral health. Their efforts deserve our acknowledgment and our applause, and I ask those state Medicaid dental program managers now in the room to please stand and accept our congratulations.

As they have over the past few

years, I hope that many state Medicaid dental program managers will continue to participate at this conference as colleagues in dental public health. I was very pleased to learn that, at their caucus this past Sunday, the dental program managers decided to form their own association to help further their communication and collaboration. To assist their organizational committee in getting their new association up and running, I am following Dr. Cohen's lead and contributing to them the honorarium accompanying this Special Merit Award. I hope their great idea becomes a reality.

Again, I extend my thanks and appreciation to AAPHD for this recognition.