



The Future is Now

Throughout my youth, I would frequently try to imagine what the future would bring. The focus of my imagination centered on the new millennium. Well, the future is now upon us and I dare say no one could have imagined the strength, level of activity, and enormous opportunities currently enjoyed by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD).

For several years, our organization has devoted significant time and resources to important internal and external issues. We have successfully refined our definition and the American Dental Association has recertified us as a specialty. We have also undertaken an exhaustive introspective evaluation of our governance and structure. The results of these efforts are the AAPD is a more democratic and geographically representative organization prepared to meet the challenges of a new era.

Now that these tasks have been accomplished, it is of the utmost importance that we unite as an organization and direct our time, efforts, and resources to our noble mission which is our dedication to improving and maintaining the oral health of infants, children, adolescents, and persons with special health care needs. As Past President Jasper Lewis has taught us, we have a unique opportunity to significantly and forever improve the quality of life of our most precious resource, the children of our nation...and of the entire world. It is a mission on which we must, and we shall, succeed.

One of the most significant obstacles our specialty faces today is a grave shortage of pediatric dentists. First recognized by our former Executive Director, John Bogert, this is a crisis that AAPD is addressing with absolute resolve and significant resources. Former President Charlie Hall appointed a Task Force on Workforce Issues under the direction of Chair Paul Reggiardo. This Task Force has enacted a Strategy to accomplish our goal of increasing pediatric dentistry postdoctoral seats available by ten seats per year through each of the next ten years.

Many members have long believed our most noble endeavor as an organization is our advocacy effort on behalf of children. AAPD is currently enjoying our most productive period ever in this arena. Through the exhaustive efforts and combined expertise of Jim Crall, Child Advocate; Heber Simmons, Congressional Liaison; and Burt Edelstein through the Children's Dental Health Project, our membership has a formidable team advocating on behalf of children's issues in Washington DC. With the strong support of the Board of Trustees, this group has established close and highly successful collaborative relationships with the Washington Office of the ADA, the Washington Office of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Association of Dental Schools, the American Society of Dentistry for Children, and numerous other private groups and governmental agencies.

Through the efforts of our advocacy program, our representatives have been successful in making pediatric dentistry postdoctoral programs eligible to compete for Health Professions Training Act (Title VII) funding for additional training positions in postdoctoral programs. Also, pediatric dentistry training programs are now included with general practice residency programs as the two postdoctoral dental programs eligible for future Title VII funding. These initiatives have the prospect of making a significant impact on the creation of additional training positions in our specialty and will further validate the designation of the pediatric dentist as a primary care provider.

AAPD leadership participated in the first ever national conference to address state dental Medicaid programs last year. AAPD has continued to work with HCFA, HRSA, and regional and state groups to implement recommendations from the conference designed to make essential improvements in this program on a state by state basis. Medicaid Regional Dental Issues Coordinators have been appointed by HCFA in each of the ten regions and AAPD has appointed a pediatric dentist in each of these locations

to advise and consult with these coordinators. We believe there will be significant progress on the issues that have restricted access to appropriate oral health care for under-privileged children. AAPD representatives also continue to work with state agencies in constructing provisions for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to assure appropriate dental services are included.

Our child advocacy team is working diligently with New Mexico Senator Bingaman who has introduced a multifaceted bill in Congress that contains a wide range of provisions designated to provide disadvantaged children with access to quality dental services.

A true visionary within our organization, Steve Moss, has proposed AAPD develop an Information Data Bank to provide essential information to our members, other dental professionals, and the public in a timely, efficient, and cost effective manner. A Task Force has been appointed to rapidly develop this concept to make this dream a reality to further enhance the oral health of children.

Finally, as we enter the new millennium, we, as a profession that provides exemplary health care for children, must expand our horizons and take a more global perspective. There are countless millions of children throughout the world who can greatly benefit from our technology and expertise. It is imperative that we develop and implement methods for enhancing training opportunities for all oral health professionals in this nation and throughout the world so that our AAPD vision of optimal oral health for all children becomes a reality.

These accomplishments and challenges represent only the tip of the iceberg of the numerous ongoing activities benefiting AAPD members and the children we are privileged to serve. Past President Art Nowak stated the future is bright. That bright future is now. Together, we make a difference!

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