

CAO Annual Meeting in Vancouver

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOURISM VANCOUVER



An aerial view of Vancouver. CAO hosts its annual meeting here October 13.

*Courage is what it takes
to stand up and speak;
courage is also what it takes
to sit down and listen.*

—Winston Churchill



David Gouthro

David Gouthro, president of the Vancouver-based firm The Consulting Edge: Movers and Shakers, Inc., will give this year's keynote address, "Building the Courage to

Change," at CAO's Annual Meeting luncheon on Monday, October 13.

In his presentation, Gouthro will look at how courage — a personal trait that is seldom examined these days — provides an important foundation for curiosity, creativity, and professional growth.

But don't expect the ordinary inspirational presentation from the founder of the Vancouver Noseflute Ensemble. His

energetic and playful approach incorporates variety, humor and fun. By way of example, one of his favorite musical instruments is the nose flute, a "physical metaphor for life." Why is it his favorite instrument? Gouthro replies, "You learn/grow/change faster if you're willing to blow it!"

For over 15 years, Gouthro has led individuals and organizations in the pursuit of the knowledge and skills needed to achieve greater effectiveness. He believes people can live happy, fulfilling lives by focusing on the positive, believing in the possibilities, and embracing the pure joy of fun and playfulness. He promises to provide a new and entertaining lens through which members and staff can view their practices, patient expectations, office teams and personal lives.

Register for CAO's luncheon meeting on PCSO's Annual Session registration form. All attendees are welcome. PCSO registration materials will be mailed to all members in mid-June.

For more information on Gouthro, visit www.theconsultingedge.com. ♦

CAO Member Running for State Assembly

CAO member Bill Emmerson of Hemet has entered the primary race for state Assemblyman in District 63, part of Riverside County in Southern California. Facing a difficult primary race, he is seeking financial support from orthodontists and dentists around the state. Last month, CAO's Board of Directors endorsed his candidacy.

Emmerson has actively served orthodontics and dentistry for years. He served on the California Dental Association's Council on Legislation and was chair of the powerful California Dental Political Action Committee. In addition, he chaired CAO's Legislative Committee and has been influential in building understanding and support for orthodontic issues in the CDA.

"He knows dental issues and politics, which makes him twice as valuable in the state legislature," states CAO President-elect Michael Ricupito. Last month,

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President's Message

New Issues, Changing Practices



Terrie Yoshikane, DDS

Life is about change, and as always, new issues constantly affect and change the practice of orthodontics. Here are some of the latest changes

of which we should be aware.

HIPAA

As of April 14, orthodontists and other healthcare providers who transmit (or authorize a third party to transmit on their behalf) health information electronically must comply with the HIPAA Privacy Rule, which protects all individually identifiable held or transmitted health information, whether the

Healthcare providers ... who transmit health information electronically must comply with the HIPAA Privacy Rule.

protected information is on paper or in electronic form.

The regulation requires practitioners to provide each patient with a written notice explaining the uses and disclosures of protected health information that they may make in connection with treatment, payment, and healthcare operations, as well as other related issues. The notice must be posted in the waiting area and be provided to a patient at the first office visit. A reasonable attempt must be

made to obtain the patient's written acknowledgement of receipt of this notice, and this acknowledgement should be retained for six years. The notice should also be provided to any person upon request.

Penalties for violating the privacy rule can be severe, varying from \$100 per civil violation to a \$250,000 fine and ten years in prison for criminal violations.

For more information, go to www.ada.org or www.aaomembers.org.

Hand Hygiene

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is releasing guidelines to improve adherence to hand hygiene in healthcare settings. The CDC is recommending that in addition to washing hands with soap and water, healthcare personnel use alcohol-based handrubs. According to the CDC, the use of gloves does not eliminate the need for hand hygiene. Likewise, the practice of hand hygiene does not eliminate the need for gloves. By using gloves, healthcare

personnel can reduce contamination from hands by 70 to 80 percent, prevent cross-contamination, and protect both themselves and patients from infection. Handrubs should be used before and after each patient is seen, just as gloves should be changed before and after each patient. Alcohol-based handrubs significantly reduce the number of microorganisms on the skin, are fast acting, and cause less skin irritation. They also take less time to use.

Prop 65

Since the January 2003 settlement of the Proposition 65 lawsuit, the California Dental Association (CDA) has been working with a toxicologist to disprove that certain dental materials named in the settlement are hazardous. Because part of the research will focus on nickel and chromium, which are used in orthodontics, CAO is working with CDA to ensure that these materials are exempted. We'll keep you posted on our progress here. Members are reminded that, for the time being, any office employing

more than nine should continue to post the Proposition 65 warning notice to patients.

AAOF

CAO is proud to have pledged a total of \$25,000 to the American Association of Orthodontists Foundation (AAOF). Education and research serve as the foundation to our profession and allow us to serve our patients in the best manner possible. It is important to make our treatment decisions evidence-based and to continue to advance our specialty. With new issues continually on the horizon, support of the AAOF is crucial to the profession.

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President Terrie Yoshikane
Editor Robert Keim
Executive Director Phillip Rollins

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MEMBER
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DENTAL EDITORS

An Interview with Dr. Paul M. Kasrovi CAO's Unique Niche in Education

Paul M. Kasrovi, DDS, is the chair of CAO's Continuing Education Committee.



Paul M. Kasrovi, DDS

CAO's Continuing Education Committee (CEC) is committed to filling the unique educational needs of orthodontics, particularly for orthodontic staff.

The CEC chairman, Dr. Paul Kasrovi of Berkeley and Oakland, believes "CAO can be on the cutting edge of education for the entire ortho office team." In a recent meeting, the committee explored a number of options outside the box of traditional educational offerings.

In addition to Dr. Kasrovi, committee members include Drs. Brad Baker, Traci Fernandes, Glenn Frial, Mike Lyons, Rich Savage and Terrie Yoshikane, plus orthodontic staff members Debbie Curiel, Cindy Ramirez and Ruby Roach.

Outside the Box

Results of surveys and informal networking and general knowledge suggest that programs like the one offered in Monterey last October have a strong appeal to both members and their staff. Ritz Carlton Director of

Quality Assurance Robin William spoke to a sold-out audience on how orthodontic practices can use the Ritz standard of excellence as a model. Her presentation earned rave reviews, particularly because its broader context seemed more

stimulating for attendees. "Going outside orthodontics for relevant education may be a key to success," says Kasrovi.

Identifying speakers and topics of interest to the full orthodontic practice is one emphasis. Another is to explore different formats of presentations. The committee is considering combined doctor and staff programs (just offered June 6 in conjunction with the central regional PCSO program), interactive panel presentations, and video conferencing between strategic locations as new possibilities. "We don't know if new ideas are going to succeed unless we're willing to try them!" Kasrovi comments. "Fear of failure should not be a stumbling block." Nevertheless, CAO will determine if new offerings are financially realistic before offering experimental programs.

In the Works

CAO has also committed to hosting a series of hands-on workshops for staff just prior to PCSO's annual session in Palm Springs in 2004. The date is tentatively Saturday, September 18. "There is

a lack of resources to learn in a hands-on environment,"

Kasrovi continues.

Generally, orthodontic staff must learn the specifics of their duties from the doctor who hires and then trains them.

Opportunities to gain hands-on knowledge about

clinical and nonclinical topics outside the office are rare. "This may end up being a real niche for CAO — and a service, both to staff and to our members."



Dr. Traci Fernandes is shown at the Monterey meeting last October with staff members Elba Spruill, Adriana Hernandez, Darlene Arevalo, and Clara Contreras.

MEETINGS CALENDAR

(In a new, more reader-friendly format.)

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

CAO Staff Education

Friday, December 12

Sacramento DoubleTree Hotel

Program to be announced.

New date. New location.

PCSO Doctor Education

Friday, December 12

Sacramento DoubleTree Hotel

Program to be announced.

New date. New location.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

CAO Staff Education

Friday, November 21

Costa Mesa Hilton Hotel

Program to be announced.

New date. New location.

PCSO Doctor Education

Friday, November 21

Costa Mesa Hilton Hotel

Dr. Jay Bowman: Class II

Combination Therapy

New date. New location.



PCSO ANNUAL SESSION

October 11-14

Vancouver, B.C., Canada

CAO ANNUAL MEETING

Monday, October 13

Vancouver, B.C., Canada

(See story on page 1.)

Readers may notice that, for the first time, PCSO and CAO are offering continuing education for members and their staff in Sacramento. Responding to member requests, the organizations are testing alternate locations. Beginning in 2004, one Southern California program may rotate to the San Diego area as well. If the meetings are well attended in these new locations, the rotations may become a regular part of the education program.

**CHECK THE CAO WEBSITE FOR
MEETING UPDATES.**

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Editorial

Orthodontic Staffing Issues

by Robert Keim, DDS



Robert Keim, DDS

It is difficult to find a profession whose members express a higher satisfaction with what they do for a living than orthodontics. As a group, ortho-

dontists are among the happiest people I know, no matter what their profession. That is not to say that the life of the orthodontist is completely without stress or complaint. Uncooperative patients annoy all of us. Overly demanding parents are a particularly bothersome source of distress. Overreaching government interference with private practice is certainly another. Just out of curiosity – one time, in an informal, non-scientific manner – I polled about 20 orthodontists on what their greatest annoyance was. Not surprisingly, it was staffing problems.

Over the last 22 years, I have had the great good fortune to work with some of the best assistants in the world. My current staff is outstanding, and I really count them as friends and family more than I consider them employees. There is nothing that eases the day-to-day burden of running a busy practice than an efficient office team that are not only

professionals at what they do but have a great time doing it.

Having said that, I must add that during that same 22 years, I have had to tolerate some assistants who weren't that great. While most of my employees have been true blessings to me, there have been a few (thankfully, a very few) who were



Evita Regala and Daniela Santos learn orthodontic assistant techniques from Dr. Steve Yang at Cerritos College in Norwalk, California.

The biggest problem ... [is] simply that good staff members are hard to come by.

true curses. They made me wonder what I had done in any of my previous lives to deserve such torment. Either they were technically incompetent, or their interpersonal office skills would have been put to better use in a pit-bull ring. While an efficient, effective and happy office staff makes life more than worth living, an inefficient,

argumentative or generally unhappy staff makes you wonder why you went into the profession in the first place.

Fortunately, in the informal poll mentioned above, the biggest problem reported with staff was not as might be expected, that of managing interpersonal conflicts, but simply that good staff members are very hard to come by. It seems that we are in the middle of a genuine staff shortage.

There are no quick fixes to the assistant shortage in this state. What we need is some innovation, creative thinking ...

While orthodontists from all over the state report difficulties in finding good assistants, offices in the major metropolitan areas do not seem to have as big a problem in finding adequate staff as do offices in outlying areas. This is not to say that it is in any way easy to find good assistants in, say, Los Angeles or San Francisco. It is not. Good people are always hard to come by. By contrast, in outlying areas such as Ridgecrest or Pondosa, it is darned near impossible to find a competent orthodontic assistant. I know of at least one orthodontist who shut down a satellite office in a remote area simply because he could not find anyone to staff it and his home office staff refused to travel.

In this publication, we hope to address some of the issues related to staffing problems. Ms. Ellen Grady, a well-known international-practice management consultant, shares her unique perspective on the issues of staffing, gleaned from her more than 30 years in the business of orthodontics. Ms. Cindy Ramirez, a practicing orthodontic assistant, shares her perspective. And Ms. June Cromwell, who teaches orthodontic assistants, offers a third take on the issue. They all bring up some very interesting points regarding why it is

Staff Perspective

The Three Rs to Retention

by **Cindy Ramirez, CDA, RDA**

Cindy Ramirez has worked for Drs. Tom Thompson and George Clarke in Fresno for over 26 years. At California Orthodontist's request, she shares her views on what makes an ortho assistant stay on the job. Cindy is president of the California Dental Assistants Association. Part of her response was published in the March 2003 issue of the CDA Journal.

In my opinion, there are three big Rs in retaining dental assistants: respect, responsibility and recognition. I appreciate the respect that my doctors and patients show me, the responsibilities that have been entrusted to me, and the recognition I receive from being a licensed professional. I think this is what most dental assistants strive for in a perfect office.

I am proud to be a part of a very respectable and responsible career. I realize it is important to retain and maintain my license. Salary and benefits are certainly important to retaining qualified assistants. But benefits attractive to the dental assistants also include health insurance, pension or profit-sharing plans, educational opportunities and allowances, and support for joining our professional organizations.



Cindy Ramirez

*I appreciate the ...
recognition I receive
from being a
licensed professional.
... I love what I do.*

Many of us face the challenge of making ends meet. Many of us are the sole providers for our families. We lose qualified individuals to other fields because those fields have the ability to offer benefits above what private practices can offer.

I chose dental assisting as a career, and I am proud to say that I have been employed in the same office for over 26 years, as have most of my coworkers there. I love what I do. I feel a great loyalty to my doctors, to the staff and to my professional organization. The three Rs are all part of my job. Is that not a great reason for hanging in there for so long? ♦

Continuing Education Committee Opening

The Continuing Education Committee has an opening. If you are interested in shaping upcoming educational events for you and your staff, then this is the committee for you! Various duties include selecting staff topics and speakers for the regional meetings, developing surveys to learn about educational needs, fostering sponsorship opportunities, and more. The committee meets twice a year. Contact Executive Director Phillip Rollins at 415-441-4697 or phillip@prollins-associates.com for further information about this opportunity.

Editorial

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hard to find good assistants and what is important to keeping them. While the main theme — that theme being economic — comes as no surprise to any of us, other issues raised by these two professionals might be a little surprising. While none of us pretend to have all of the answers when it comes to avoiding staff problems, Ellen, Cindy and June do provide some.

There are no quick fixes to the assistant shortage in this state. What we need is some innovative, creative thinking with respect to recruiting good people to orthodontic assisting, to training those people to function at a very high level of proficiency, and to retaining them in a mutually rewarding working relationship. Some of that creative thinking must come at the organizational level. Working together, we orthodontists of CAO should be able to come up with some solutions to training, recruiting and staff retention that are much better than what we might conceive on our own. ♦

CAO's Niche

Continued from page 3

For Doctors Too

CAO's CE Committee considered the educational needs for orthodontists as well. Two topics emerged as opportunities for the future: One is offering a business school for orthodontists that would be modeled after a program hosted recently by the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) in Orlando entitled "Orthodontist as CEO." Another is a lifestyle retreat to be held in a resort location; its purpose is to build office teams and personal-professional relationships. (See story on page 7.)

Attempting to find the pulse of the members on these innovative ideas, CAO sent an electronic survey to members in May via email. Responses on these and other topics will be tabulated and reported in future issues of *California Orthodontist*. ♦

Guest Opinion

Where Are the Orthodontic RDAs?

by Ellen M. Grady

Ellen Grady, an orthodontic consultant with 30 years experience, is assistant clinical professor in the School of Dentistry at the University of Southern California, where she offers her expertise to orthodontic residents. At the invitation of the Editor, she shares her thoughts on why there is a shortage of orthodontic assistants and makes some interesting recommendations for solving the problem.



Ellen Grady

Orthodontic treatment is not like any other form of dentistry; orthodontic practices pioneered the use of clinical staff in helping to provide patient care. The dictionary defines *assistant* as a helper, and the Latin base of the word means "bystander." This certainly does not define orthodontic clinical staff!

The RDA, as licensed by the state of California, is an active participant in the patient's orthodontic treatment. Unlike other areas of dentistry, the RDA in orthodontics legally performs many details of the patient's appointment under the direct supervision of the orthodontist. Not only does this allow the orthodontist to see more patients per day, but it has also made clinical staff feel that working in orthodontics is more desirable than working in the general dental field.

So where are the RDAs that are needed to work in our California orthodontic practices?

Competition

It is clear that many young people no longer consider dental assisting a profession of choice. It is not viewed as an exciting and new job, nor is it perceived as a career path with advancement possibilities. More young people seek jobs in computer or business fields

because they perceive that these jobs offer more opportunities. It is also probable that once experience is gained in these fields, one can earn more money than an RDA. Clearly, family influences on work choices has also made a difference. While the media have consistently published information showing the expanding need for medical and dental staff, the healthcare industry is still perceived as one of hard work, low pay, little advancement, lack of appreciation,

and having some risk of exposure to injury or disease. It's no wonder that many young people are not encouraged by parents to go into clinical staff positions of dentistry, unless it is viewed as a better job option over what other family members have been able to achieve.

All these influences have affected



CAO raffles gift baskets of goodies as a perk for staff who attend educational sessions.

orthodontics as well. The number responding to a help-wanted ad for RDAs is small, and the list becomes very short when orthodontic experience is required.

Compensation Issues

Most available positions are for trained clinical staff in private practice.

While this environment is friendly and motivating and while it is a place to maintain one's identity in a team-oriented workplace, the wage-benefit package is often not enough to

support oneself in California.

Therefore, most RDAs that stay in the field have supplemental income (either from parents or from a spouse).

The income of an orthodontic practice, the need for a practice to be profitable, and the owner's perception of the value of staff all influence the compensation offered. Orthodontists have long recognized the value of quality staff, but they usually do not have the ability to pay wages competitive with other fields. In addition, the high cost of living in California makes the compensation problem particularly acute for the private practitioner. It is also fiscally impossible for most practitioners (who typically have a small number of employees) to offer the ben-

efits that are often found in larger companies. Another element is the perceived lack of appreciation from younger staff towards the doctors who offer additional perks (such as the

Orthodontists ... recognize the value of quality staff, but they usually do not have the ability to pay wages competitive with other fields.

From Sacramento

Legislative and Regulatory Update

The upcoming legislative session looks relatively quiet in comparison to previous years. A monster state budget deficit tends to have that type of impact on new initiatives. There are, however, a couple of developments of potential interest to CAO members.

Dental Board Composition

Assembly Bill 1007 addresses the membership composition of the Dental Board of California and reflects ongoing discussions and testimony between the California Dental Association (CDA) and the Joint Legislative Sunset Review Committee. CDA believes that the composition of the board should reflect the population of dentists practicing in California and represent specialty expertise as well. Currently, the member composition of the Dental Board is heavily skewed towards general dentists and oral surgeons; there are no orthodontist representatives on the Dental Board.

Restructuring of Duties and Educational Requirements for Dental Assistants

Senate Bill 844 is CDA's vehicle for restructuring both the duties of and education for dental assistants. CDA's proposed Career Pathways would expand the scope of practice for all dental auxiliary categories. Instead of having an affirmative process, as currently exists in the California Dental Practices Act (staff can perform only listed duties), CDA's revisions would create more flexibility for technological advancements, streamline education requirements, and allow innovative opportunities for dental assistants

entering the field through on-the-job training. Streamlining education requirements could be particularly important for assistants interested in such specialties as orthodontics because they would not be required to train in other areas found in the existing RDA category. CDA's Career Pathways proposal is currently before the Joint Legislative Sunset Review Committee.

Proposition 65

Members may recall that CDA and CAO have 180 days from the settlement date of the Proposition 65 lawsuit to have nickel and chromium

CAO's AED Returns to Maine

Associate Executive Director Mike Russell has returned to his home state of Maine. He and his fiancée Katie will marry there this summer. His resignation was effective on May 16.

Mike has had a major influence on the advances that CAO has made in the two years of his tenure here. We are sorry to see him leave. With thanks for his contributions, we wish him and Katie well.

removed from the hazardous chemicals enumerated in the settlement. CDA has contracted with a toxicologist who is considered a metals expert and has particular expertise working with nickel. CAO is working closely with CDA on this issue. A draft report is expected early this summer. ❖

New Education Effort Afoot

Ever thought about attending a retreat with your staff to look at balancing work and personal priorities? Want to do it in a wonderful location? See it as an educational and professional perk for your office team? Need the stimulation of top experts to facilitate your learning?

CAO's Continuing Education Committee is proposing such a retreat, perhaps in 2005. Its purpose is to help orthodontic office teams strike a balance between work and living skills — with the end result being a more productive and satisfying orthodontic practice environment.

With participation limited to 20–25 offices, the proposed retreat would be held over a weekend and include expert speakers and workshop facilitators, most likely from outside the orthodontic field. Attendees would explore ways of increasing patient and personal satisfaction while developing a greater understanding and ability to balance both personal and professional life demands.

This new educational offering and others have been proposed to members in an electronic survey that was sent via email earlier this month. Preferences for this and other program ideas will be tabulated in the coming months and used in planning for the future. For further information, contact CAO headquarters at 415-441-4697. ❖

RDA Shortage: Thoughts from a Teaching RDA by June Cromwell, RDA

June Cromwell of the Clinical Orthodontics Department at the USC School of Dentistry combines chairside assisting for faculty with teaching and administrative roles.

What motivates a young person to go into dental assisting as a career? Why does an assistant want to focus on orthodontics rather than on general dentistry? What are the unique impediments faced by a student who wants to become an orthodontic assistant?

Answers to these questions might help explain the shortage of orthodontic assistants in today's marketplace.

Why An Assisting Career? When asked this question, most students say they choose dental assisting so that they can get jobs that are not in a medical practice setting yet still work with patients. While it sounds clichéd, most express a desire to help people and see dental assisting as a way to do that. These students are eager to be a part of a healthcare team. They relish the doctor-nurse teamwork and generally want to become very involved in direct patient care. Many of these students become great orthodontic assistants because they can legally deliver a greater scope of care in orthodontics than they can in general dentistry.

Others enter dental assisting as a first step into the field of dentistry. For these students, dental assisting is a steppingstone to a career in dental hygiene or dentistry. They want to learn more about dentistry in a direct, hands-on environment and see assisting as a good way to do that. These students generally turn out to be phenomenal assistants, but they tend to move on rather rapidly. After all, their goal is to use assisting as a steppingstone. And they do just that.

Why Orthodontics? Some are attracted to orthodontics specifically because generally orthodontic care is given to enhance facial appearance and to improve a patient's self-esteem rather than to treat a disease process. These students enjoy seeing an improved malocclusion, the subsequent changes in a patient's overall appearance, and the way that patient feels about him- or herself. Since most orthodontic patients are in their early teens, patient care in this environment means helping mold young people into attractive and self-assured young adults. Many, if not most, students who attend school in order to become RDAs say that they want to work in orthodontic offices. So why is there a perceived shortage of orthodontic assistants?

Lack of Training For one thing, there is a real problem in finding orthodontic training. Most dental assisting programs devote the vast majority of time to training general dental assistants; that is, teaching the minimum skill sets necessary to meet RDA requirements. All assisting schools teach at least a little about orthodontics, but none teach very much. Technical schools, which provide about 34 weeks of training, frequently provide only a few hours of orthodontic curriculum. Community colleges generally offer four semesters (approximately 60 weeks) of education and generally provide more curriculum time to orthodontics. Some community colleges have hands-on relationships between the assisting program and local dental schools, but this varies from school to school. Needless to say, this leaves much orthodontic training to be conducted in the orthodontic office, on the job.

Perhaps, California orthodontists want to increase their support of the community colleges and request that they provide more hands-on orthodontic training. Alternatively, some in-office observation and participation time could be arranged for students in training programs.

Income Shortfall Possibly, the biggest reason for the perceived shortage of orthodontic assistants is economic. Pay scales generally range from \$15 to \$20 per hour, with some going as high as \$22 per hour. But at best, this is a good supplementary income. Given the high cost of living in California, nobody can exist on this amount. Coupled with the fact that few assisting positions come with healthcare or retirement benefits, it is easy to see why the job lacks appeal as a long-term career option. The answers to these problems are simple and straightforward, if not readily affordable for the doctor: pay more and provide benefits!

If an assistant has supplemental support (for example, from a spouse with a good job), working in an orthodontic office has tremendous appeal compared to other areas of dentistry. Orthodontic assistants have the opportunity to work in a healthcare field without having to deal with disease; they can enjoy the intimacy of working in a small business; and they can promote dental health on a one-to-one basis in a fun setting with an interesting set of patients. I advise any young person interested in becoming an orthodontic assistant to try it! I also advise that, as they do so, they should make every effort to become as technically proficient as possible. The more an assistant learns, the more he or she can get out of the position — both personally and professionally.

Where are the RDAs?

Continued from page 6

costs of CE classes for the RDA). All too often the perks are expected — which leaves the practitioners to wonder why the money was spent when “no one seems to care.” An interesting dichotomy.

Inadequate Training

Adding to the distress is that RDA training does not provide enough information in orthodontics. A newly graduated RDA cannot step into an office and perform actual treatment (such as giving oral hygiene instructions, changing A-lastics, removing archwires, or selecting the correct archwire when asked to get a specific NiTi or stainless-steel wire from the supply). If these skills were already present in the new hire, that staff member would be more valuable and productive to the orthodontist. The training that remains can still be done in the office, but the new hire is able to contribute while learning additional skills.

New Solutions, Please

Can CAO help? Would orthodontists approve an increase in dues if it would help fund additional orthodontic training in some organized training centers? Would orthodontists (perhaps as part of regional study groups) underwrite periodic off-site training days for their staff and new hires so that they can acquire the necessary knowledge faster? While each orthodontist has his or her own techniques and procedures, much can be standardized into a formal program so that only some concepts and procedures would require detailed training in the office. Many orthodontists have purchased various training materials and paid for staff to attend seminars, thereby acknowledging that such aids are useful.

Another option, though controversial, is to eliminate the RDA requirement. This would allow each doctor to hire and train from available applicants,

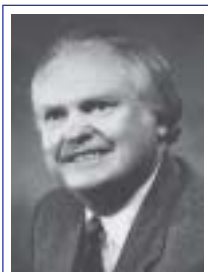
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Delta Dental Update

Four Steps in the Right Direction

by **Tom Thompson, DDS**
Delta Dental Committee Chair

The manager of the orthodontic department at Delta Dental Plan of California (DDPC) makes three recommendations on claim filing that should help speed up processing by DDPC and result in less frustration for orthodontic offices.



Tom Thompson, DDS

- First, do not file a claim every month for a patient under treatment. File a form for each new patient at the beginning of treatment. You then will automatically receive the patient's benefit, in payments of 50 percent initially, 25 percent in 6 months, and the final 25 percent in 12 months. If the patient's total benefit is \$500 or less, you will receive the full benefit as the first (and only) payment.
- Second, if a patient has dual dental plan coverage for orthodontics, indicate the amount of the prime coverage benefit on your initial claim.
- Third, when filing an electronic claim

that does not exceed 80 characters in length, list the following information:

1. Type of dentition
2. Number of months
3. Active treatment start date
4. Down payment
5. Monthly payment

Following these suggestions should also result in a more efficient billing system for your office.

Another Positive Step

For months, CAO's Delta Committee has attempted to schedule a meeting with DDPC representatives, following members' complaints which began in January 2003 about the CDT-3 conversion. A meeting was finally scheduled for June 16 in San Francisco to address the methodology used to establish the 80th percentile fees and to discuss other issues that rankle members.

Please continue to contact any one of the Delta Dental Committee members with issues to raise with DDPC: Drs. Bill Barton, Earl Johnson, Al Landucci, Chuck Wear, or Tom Thompson. We will report the results of this important meeting in the next issue of *California Orthodontist*. ❖

CHECK IT OUT

CAO's website: www.caortho.org

President's Message

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Continuing Education

CAO continues to develop educational programs for orthodontic staff. (See the interview with our Continuing Education Committee chairman, Paul Kasrovi, on page 2 of this issue.) The committee has created an online survey to assess member opinions about hands-on training workshops proposed for next year and a team-building retreat in the following year. Last month, email invitations to participate in this survey were sent through the AAO to all members with email addresses, and the survey was sent to respondents in early June. If you did not receive your invitation to participate, address an email request to phillip@prollins-associates.com and we will add your name to the list. Survey results should be available later this summer. We'll be sure to share them with members in future issues of this newsletter. The board is enthusiastic about these progressive education plans. Staff education will continue to be a priority for us.

In addition, CAO will host its 2003 annual meeting luncheon for members and their guests during PCSO's annual session in Vancouver. David Gouthro is sure to interest, challenge and entertain. (See the cover story.) The board and I look forward to seeing you there! ❖

Emmerson Runs for Assembly

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CDA mailed a letter from Ricupito and PCSO President-elect Jim Peck to all CAO members, requesting financial support for Emmerson's campaign. The goal is to raise \$300,000 by June 30, the end of the next campaign filing period.

CAO members are asked to donate anywhere from \$250 to the \$3,200 maximum. Contributions can be mailed to Bill Emmerson for Assembly, ID #1254586, P.O. Box 7607, Redlands, CA, 92375. For additional information about the Emmerson campaign, visit his website at www.billemmerson.com or call CAO at 415-441-4697. ❖

Where are the RDAs?

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as is done in most other states. On the other hand, holding an RDA license from California (a state with continuing education and quality standards obligations) has been a source of pride and professionalism and it would be disappointing to many if licensure were no longer available. In addition, it is unclear how this would really solve the problem.

We all know the joys of working in the orthodontic profession, but we need something different to attract qualified people to the field, then keep them motivated to stay. The two major complications to the supply of orthodontic RDAs are economics and training. There is a definite need to fill, and the currently available resources have not been able to solve the problem. It's time for some new approaches. ♦

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