

Oral Health ... From Good to Better

Monica Dana Monea

Department of Odontology and Periodontology, Faculty of Dental Medicine, University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Tîrgu Mureş, Romania

The dental profession is known for working to eliminate dental caries and periodontal disease, but we cannot rest on the laurels of fluoride and electrical toothbrushes. Over the years we witnessed a silent debate as to whether we are really doctors or just dental technicians who clean teeth, deliver porcelain crowns and replace amalgam restorations. From my point of view, a good dentist must be a combination of diagnostician, technician, healer and artist, but if we truly aspire to become health providers, our goal of excellence must aim towards the elimination of dental disease and not just the treatment of its consequences.

In the last 20 years there has been a complete transition from reactive dentistry, which implies treating according to symptoms, to a very much prevention oriented dental profession. This new concept means that instead of reacting to an already established oral health problem, the treatment must focus on preventing dental diseases before irreversible damage to oral hard and soft tissues occurs.

Excellence is what all oral health care professionals fight for during the treatment of their patients. Over 6 years of dental education we became aware of what must be the golden rule of our professional life — try to do the very best in examination, diagnosis, treatment and even refer to a specialist when necessary. After graduation, we constantly spend many hours of continuing education in an effort to provide latest treatment options for different steps of dental treatments.

However, if we evaluate carefully the curriculum of dental schools and post-graduate courses, the primary topic is the damage produced by a specific disease, not the prevention of the disease itself. Therefore, I found that epidemiological research conducted on large study groups will represent the best way to identify and eliminate the risk factors for a specific pathological process and provide the knowledge absolutely necessary in order to recognize alterations on their onset.

Our dental faculty has constantly grown and been quite active, which allows us to be very proud of its accomplishments. This was a slow process, as the number of new dental educators and researchers is a very small proportion of graduates, due mostly to economical factors. Despite all difficulties, now we have a strong staff member group, consequent in demonstrating high qualities in dental teaching and research. The best proof is the series of scientific articles presented by our colleagues, which focus on different specialities of dental medicine. The interdisciplinary approach and preoccupation for evidence based dentistry guarantee the theoretical and practical value of these studies.

In the future, we must be concerned with exploring new training opportunities, develop the oral health research environment and increase the attraction for a career in dental teaching and research. But most importantly, we have to act as mentors, as a wise and trusted counselor, as described in Homer's *The Odyssey*. In my opinion, this is the path that allows us to transform dental medicine and the oral health of our patients from good to better!