

Face the Future of Dentistry: Art or Business

Letic-Gavrilovic Anka*

Department of Physiology and Biochemistry, School of Dentistry, Serbia

***Corresponding Author:** Letic-Gavrilovic Anka, Department of Physiology and Biochemistry, Associate Professor at School of Dentistry, Pancevo, Serbia.

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The dental profession today is in an extremely complex situation. The doctors and whole dental team are going through a transformation brought about by rapid changes in contemporary society and particularly in dental technology. The face of dentistry is also changing due to outside control by insurance companies and government regulations. To be successful in today's environment, the modern dentist must be a master of both art and science in his/her dental practice. It is an honour for me to review this noble profession and respectfully suggest *E-Cronicon* Journal publisher, the areas where high born characteristics of the dental profession will be implemented.

Dentists are skilled, conscientious, civic-minded individuals who work with community leaders, educators, other health professionals and government officials. They often provide volunteer services to school health programs and to elderly, handicapped or financially challenged citizens, hereby demonstrating a selflessness that is a hallmark of professionalism and nobility. A good dentist must have a few essential characteristics;

Prestige: Dentists provide an essential health care service and are highly respected within the community. In the future the majority of dentists will be female and working on a part time basis.

Flexibility: Dentistry allows you to be your own boss and can balance their personal and professional lives to meet their individual needs and desires. In the future, dentists will deal with a more diverse customer base.

Creativity: Dentists are artists as well as scientists. To brighten one tooth or realign an entire jaw, dentists must have an artist's esthetic sense to help their patients look their best.

Personal satisfaction: A career in dentistry is personally fulfilling. Dentists perform an important public service to help people maintain their health and appearance. To serve the present and future oral health needs of their patients, dentists are gifted with the challenge of a lifetime of learning. Tomorrow's dentists will be at the cutting edge of high technology, making the practice of dentistry even more exciting and rewarding than it is today.

As new eras approach, financial impact and strong investments in new technology will raise the barrier to dentists who will be opening new dental practices. Dentistry is like other industries; therefore, prices and services vary greatly among dental offices. Some of these differences can be understood better if we realize that each dental office has its own unique way of practicing dentistry. For example, it is more costly and takes more time and training for a dentist to use the newer composite materials than to use mercury amalgam as a dental filling. Consequently, the fees can be considerably higher to have your teeth restored with the newer composites. Prices can vary greatly among dentists who use the newer composites exclusively. These price differences can result from the cost of the composites used and from the skill level of the dentist. Dentists who use composites and attend special workshops acquire additional training in the skills needed to apply the material to the tooth. Not all dentists have trained as intently at applying the composites, just as all artists are not equally trained at painting a sunset. Those with greater skills can, and often do, charge a higher price for their services.

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In the future, dentist will have to learn how to struggle with the continuous increase in costs. Equipment, staff, fixed costs, variable costs and supplies are raising costs whereas the revenues are flat or declining. The only way to overcome this is through economics of scale which is only available in managed group practice. It is evident that dentistry is a recession-resistant industry, growing at an annual rate of over 5%.; however, in the future it will be better to work in a group than alone. Group practice will have very attractive growing possibilities compared to those of individuals. Additionally, dental school debt can be as high as \$250,000 or more. Who can afford to buy a practice on top of this burden? The doors are closing for new dentists which might explain why fewer than 20% of new graduates are seeking practice ownership. Managed group practice looks like the answer to both of these situations.

The next generation of technological innovation will soon be upon us, from the maturation of labs-on-a-chip, pharmacogenomics, nanotechnology, molecular imaging, and tissue engineering to the development of systems and computational biology. This emerging wave of scientific and technological advances will accelerate the development of molecular-based oral care, a change that has been en-route for the past decade and which will likely dominate future accomplishments and anniversaries. Scientific research in the dental field due to biologic complexities of oral diseases and their effective treatment will require increased inter-disciplinary collaboration and innovation. In the literature, we can find the results of the first genome-wide association (GWAS) study on dental caries. A melding of genomics with relatively low-cost DNA sequencing technology, GWAS studies can produce rapid genome scans of large cohorts of people with a predisposition to a specific oral or dental disease. Computer algorithms then release the sequence data and occasionally detect shared variations in utterly unexpected genes. Scientists reported preliminary data that listed several candidate genes of caries risk that, quite unexpectedly, are involved in salivary flow and diet preference.

Oral health care must become more biology- and evidence-based in coming years. Thus, dentists and the broader oral health community would be wise to begin preparing now for this fundamental shift. In the United States, where quality control is a dominant factor in making healthcare decisions, the oral health community must prepare to stand upon a solid clinical research base. This fact is a major reason to continue to broadly engage the biomedical research community at large. As a discipline, oral health research offers a unique window of accessibility to study inflammation, microbial biofilms, bone metabolism and repair, and exocrine glands and their secretions in real time. It is clear that evidence based dentistry can set up a new model for utilization of systematic processes to incorporate current research into clinical practice. The evidence-based process requires the practitioner to follow recent publications because, in the future, practice based research networks will be imperative. The outcome of any dental research should be in its publication. A well-designed study that has been properly and ethically executed and well-presented with sufficient impact and reproducibility often attracts many citations. Education gained though evidence based dentistry in developed countries must improve to cope with future patient flow and fewer technicians/dentists per patient. Simpler and more standardized treatment protocols will be important to reduce chair time and, consequently, increase efficiency. Education through publications remains key to support growth in emerging markets. *E-Cronicon* journal and its high level, peer-reviewed publications will highly contribute to this factor. Productivity will be higher, chair time will be shorter, and group practices (including dental chains) will increase while single-owner practices will decline, many dental procedures will change, dental implants will become an increasingly attractive economic option for dentists that will be driven by prosthetic, and the number of dental patients with co-morbidities will increase.

As countries develop and oral health education becomes available to larger populations, dental care is improved and trends towards disease prevention. In societies where preventive dentistry has been widely implemented, the need for oral rehabilitation is significantly decreased and the community needs become more esthetic and functional. The need for improvement of dental and facial appearance will increase and greater opportunities will arise for cosmetic dentistry and orthodontics.

In the near future, patients will want more and better information on dental health & treatment options. Therefore, dentist should increasingly follow continuing education trough different media, and why not, trough open access journals like *E-Cronicon*.

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