Looking ahead through a reaview mirror

By Editor in Chief David L. Hoexter, DMD, BA, FACD, FICO

This year looks to be one of decision and direction. I think we can all agree that 2008 was a year of high highs and lows, wrong decisions and indecision. It was a year that really tested our trust. Sometimes we were floating on clouds and sometimes the clouds couldn’t sustain our weight and we spiraled downward. Queen Elizabeth, the pinnacle of proper English, put it best when she called 1992 “annus horribilis,” or “horrible year,” which can also be applied to 2008.

Hopefully, the new administration will bring necessary change. As a country, we became greedy and obsessed with material possessions. We were weighed down and defeated by banks, mortgage companies, Wall Street and government leaders. Even Congress revoked protections that had previously been in place to protect the unwary consumer. Unfortunately, the subprime mortgage fallout affected the entire world. Trust was lost. Whose fault was it, the greed of the seller or the lust of the buyer? Wall Street’s “three card monty” left a void. Business slowed and allocations of jobs were lost. Bank mismanagement left society without future security. What about their oral health care?

The economic difficulties of 2008 were joined with hatred, uncertainty, killings and violence. In Mumbai (Bombay), India, innocent persons were slaughtered. For what reason and toward what cause did this happen? The world’s unseen enemy thrives on emotional unrest and public apathy. We are now recognizing that we must become more involved and aware. Tim Russert would have alerted and guided us consciously on TV, but alas, he passed away. What should we do? As dentists, we must step up and do our part to heal the nation. With a strong voice we must help rebuild the foundation of trust that has been violated by the events of 2008. We must regroup, become stronger and be more protective of our profession and our patients. Our government should work along side of us, giving incentives to those who help heal the community.

Myriad scientific studies have shown gum disease to be a forerunner of dire consequences to the body. As a profession, it is up to us to make sure that our patients maintain good oral health, and as a profession we have the right to be reimbursed for this service by insurance companies. How else can we detect problems and protect our patients? Gone are the days when dentistry was thought of as a nonessential service, not reimbursable. We must return to the basics of good oral health and we must be compensated.

At the same time, we must all do our part to help those less fortunate. Trudy Heller in her book, “A Daughter’s Love,” points out that lower income groups tend to eat less nutritious, cheaper foods. This leads to increased caries, poorer oral awareness and an inability to function orally. To ameliorate this situation, Heller started a free children’s dental clinic for all children in Jerusalem, Israel.

In the United States, we have record pre-term, low birth weight for babies born in this country, and it is due to periodontal disease. It is essential for healthy future generation that women of child-bearing age be made aware of this and treated for periodontal disease.

We are now in 2009. The past is the past. Hope is the future and it is eternal. We must campaign to help the public become aware of the nutritional foods that are necessary for good oral health. We must help the young to acquire good oral hygiene. We can volunteer as dentists to participate this year in elementary schools and educate today’s youth on how to prevent caries and other oral problems. We should reward those who do benevolent deeds and we should plan together how to proceed.

Most importantly, we must learn to forgive, learn to listen and avoid repeating obvious errors. Plenty of you are already doing your part and plenty of you have great ideas for the future. I would like to hear from you. Please e-mail me at DrDhoexter@gmail.com and let me know your thoughts, and tell me about who is doing what to help.

Learn from the annus horribilis year of 2008 … and don’t forget to brush! From Wall Street to Main Street and everywhere in between, stay up to date with the latest news.

About the author

Dr. David L. Hoexter (BA, DMD, FACD, FICO, FIDFC, FICD) is director of the International Academy for Dental Facial Esthetics, an organization that combines physicians and dentists with related fields in research and relates its findings to clinical practice. He is also clinical professor in periodontics at Temple University, Philadelphia.

He was previously clinical professor in periodontics at the University of Pittsburgh. He received his degree from Tufts University, where he was an adjunct professor in periodontics. He is a Diplomate of Implantology in the International Congress of Oral Implantologists as well as the American Society of Osseointegration, and a Diplomate of the American Board of Aesthetic Dentistry.

Hoexter lectures throughout the world and has published nationally and internationally. He has been awarded 11 fellowships, including FADCO, FICD and Pierre Fauchard. He maintains a practice at 654 Madison Ave., New York City, limited to periodontics, prosthodontics, orthodontics and esthetic surgery. He can be reached at (212) 555-0004 or drdaviddl@aol.com.

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