Looking ahead through a rearview mirror

By Editor in Chief David L. Hoexter, DDS, BA, FAD, FICO

T his year looks to be one of decision and direction. I think we can all agree that 2008 was a year of 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 self-absorbed and deceived 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 last of the buyer? Wall Street’s “three card Monty” left a void. Business slowed and a large number of jobs were lost. Bank mismanagement left society without future security. What about our 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? Is Mumbai thriving 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. And what about the other dentists, we must step up and do our part to heal the nation. With a strong voice we must help to 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 Daught er’s Love,” points out that lower social 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 generations. In the research and relates its finding 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 the International Academy for Dental Facial Esthetics, an organization that combines physicians and dentists with other related fields in research and relates its finding to clinical practice. He is also clinical professor in periodontics at Temple University, Philadelphia.

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