Record level of support for 20th annual OHA Gala

Oral Health America (OHA), a non-profit organization founded in 1955 and headquartered in Chicago, held its 20th annual gala and benefit on Feb. 24 at Chicago’s historic Union Station. Nearly 900 guests participated in silent and live auctions to benefit OHA while networking with fellow professionals before the Chicago Midwinter Dental Meeting.

The event raised more than $400,000 — the highest amount in the gala’s 20-year history — for OHA’s programs that bring healthy mouths to life.

Proceeds from the auctions support Smiles Across America®, an OHA program that assists oral disease prevention services in schools for children who are unable to obtain routine dental care due to lack of resources, low literacy or language barriers. The program works in collaboration with school districts and community partners.

Oral Health America provided $1.5 million in funding to 27 states. Through 2009, SAA and now reaches 90 treatment participation schools and community partners, of Public Health, Chicago Public School’s oral health initiative.

"Our gala shined a special spotlight on our work with children in school-based and school-linked settings across the country, and gave attendees the opportunity to support a national program that is at work with at-risk children and families in schools, clinics and neighborhoods in their own communities."

The gala was sponsored by DentalQuest, Patterson Dental, Ivoclar Vivadent, Midmark, 1-800-DENT-TISP, Colgate-Palmolive, Henry Schein Dental, Chicago Dental Society, Belmont Publications, SciCan, National Dentex, Philips Sonicare, Unilever, Mr. and Mrs. Bernard J. Beazley, Burkhart Dental Supply, ConFirm Monitoring Systems, Argen Corporation, Tokuyama Dental, DENTSPLY International, GC America, DentalEZ Group and OralDNA.

Smilecompare donated the production of a video, shown for the first time at the gala, that highlights the impact of OHA’s SAA program. The video makes the case for oral health’s importance to overall health, and OHA’s support of community-based efforts to ensure that children get a healthy start through having a healthy mouth.

The video can be accessed at www.dentalcompare.com/video_view.asp?videoid=528. OHA’s mission is to change lives by connecting communities with resources to increase access to oral health care, education and advocacy for all Americans, especially those most vulnerable.

For more information about Smiles Across America® or any of OHA’s programs, visit www.oralhealthamerica.org.
Top tips to prevent tooth grinding

By Keri Kramer, Chicago Dental Society

How are Americans dealing with these difficult economic times? If you ask dentists, they’re taking the stress out on their teeth. In the fall of 2009, the Chicago Dental Society surveyed more than 250 of its members to see if stressing about the economy was wreaking havoc on patients’ oral health.

Nearly 75 percent of dentists surveyed said their patients reported increased stress in their lives. And 65 percent of dentists said they have seen an increase in jaw clenching and teeth grinding among their patients.

Jaw clenching and teeth grinding, or bruxism, can be a temporary nuisance during stressful times that causes headaches and sleep problems, but it can also cause lasting problems for your teeth and gums. It can lead to muscle inflammation, broken teeth or even damaged dental work, such as crowns and fillings.

Dentists are sharing the following tips with their patients to help them cope with the pressures of the world — before their teeth pay the price:

1. Take a pain reliever. If grinding and clenching is causing you headaches and muscle soreness in your jaw, take an anti-inflammatory medication, such as Advil or Aleve, shortly before bedtime.
2. Massage. Try massaging the muscles along your jaw line, from the joint near your ear all the way to your chin to relieve jaw soreness.
3. Avoid caffeine. Coffee may help you get going in the morning, but caffeine combined with stress can lead to increased muscle tension.
4. Increase your consumption of water. If cutting caffeine completely from your life won’t work for you, at least try to avoid it within several hours of bedtime.
5. Be careful with your diet. When the jaw muscles get inflamed, it’s best to go easy on them for a while by avoiding foods that require vigorous chewing. Ice and gum chewing are a definite no-no. And don’t even think about that triple-decker cheeseburger that almost requires you to unhinge your jaw to eat it.
6. Exercise. You didn’t want to hear this one did you? But exercise relieves stress and reduces anxiety, the two biggest culprits of grinding.
7. Meditate. Try a yoga class to achieve some relaxation. Even taking a moment before bedtime to do some deep breathing can be a big help.
8. Wear a mouth guard. If you have serious grinding and clenching issues, talk to your dentist about a mouth guard to wear at night.

The Chicago Dental Society recently held its 145th annual midwinter meeting, which brought more than 30,000 dental professionals to Chicago in February. The meeting is a forum for dentists to learn about new products, technologies and methods.
‘Lack of dentists on oral health panels,’ ADA protests

The Institute of Medicine Committee on Oral Health Access to Services was taken to task recently by the American Dental Association for its decision to exclude private practice dentists from two panels it is convening at the behest of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The panels are tasked with studying oral health care delivery and access.

ADA President Dr. Ronald Tankersley testified before the Institute of Medicine (IOM) on March 4. He pointed out that private practice dentists represent nearly 92 percent of all professionally active dentists, and he said their input is crucial to addressing the oral health care access issue. “I am obligated, on behalf of our members, to protest the IOM’s continuing failure to include representatives of the private practice dental community on either of its two oral health panels,” Tankersley said. “We respect the experience and knowledge of the committee members, but the nation’s 167,000 private practice dentists represent some 92 percent of professionally active dentists in the United States. Without them, there can be no significant impact on access to oral health care, regardless of the delivery system.”

Tankersley went on to outline the ADA’s efforts to address ways to improve access for underserved populations.

“The ADA believes that oral health depends on preventing oral disease,” he said. “The nation will never drill and fill its way out of this problem. Our efforts to improve access to care have taught us that there are many contributing factors and barriers to the problem. Some are economic and others environmental. Some are direct and others indirect. Some are related to the individual and others to the provider. The ADA has been on the vanguard of advocating access solutions.”

Tankersley cited the following ADA initiatives as examples:

• Designing and implementing a pilot program for its prevention-focused Community Dental Health Coordinator, a community health worker with dental skills now active in Philadelphia, rural Oklahoma and Indian tribal areas.
• Convening an Access to Dental Care Summit in 2009 for a broad range of 144 stakeholders to identify short- and long-term ways to improve oral health for underserved populations.
• Creating a Public Health Advisory Committee to provide a formal presence within the ADA to receive input on issues of public health significance.
• Convening the 2007 American Indian/Alaska Native summit to collaboratively address the unique needs of these populations.
• Implementing an initiative to address oral health needs of the vulnerable elderly, one outcome of which will be the introduction of federal legislation.
• Seeking to increase collaboration among private practice dentists and those working in federally qualified health centers and other dental safety net clinics, where about 69 percent of the dentists are members of the ADA.
• Lobbying for virtually every federal program that could effectively improve access for the dentally underserved.

While the current dental delivery system serves most Americans well, we must work together to extend that system to the most vulnerable among us, who are at the greatest risk for developing oral disease,” Tankersley said.

He said the ADA believes there are concrete ways to help prevent oral disease:

• To rebuild the public health infrastructure and expand adequately funded safety-net programs, including Medicaid.
• To increase community-based prevention programs.
• To improve oral health literacy.

“Our current dental public health infrastructure is insufficient to address the needs of the underserved, and the gap between those needs and the ability to address those needs is growing,” Tankersley said.

Best smiles at Oscars?

By Fred Michmershuisen, Online Editor

We’ve all heard of the best and worst dressed lists that fashionistas compile after the annual Academy Awards ceremony. Now, there’s a list of the celebrities who flashed some of the best (and worst) smiles on the red carpet.

Dr. Catrise Austin, owner of VIP Smiles and author of “5 Steps to the Hollywood A-List Smile: How the Stars Get That Perfect Smile and How You Can Too,” surveyed the hottest Hollywood smiles before the recent Oscars ceremony and announced her top picks for the most notable smiles.

And the envelope, please...

According to Austin, Queen Latifah not only looked stunning in her on-shouldered studded dress, but she also had one of the most radiant smiles of the night. Austin referred to Latifah’s pearly whites as the “Smile Fit for a Queen.”

The award for “Best Male Celebrity Smile” went to playful Hollywood hunk George Clooney.

Austin commended heartthrob Zac Efron — who reportedly transformed his smile before becoming a superstar by closing his gap with porcelain veneers — for rocking a “very sexy white smile.”

Meryl Streep showcased a dazzling white smile along with her beautiful white dress. “From head to toe she was simply gorgeous,” Austin said.

At least one celebrity, however, did not fare so well. Morgan Freeman, whose teeth looked like they “desperately needed a boost of teeth whitening to brighten his dull yellow smile,” received the award for “A Smile Not Worth a Million Dollars! Ouch!”

Teeth whitening is the No. 1 requested cosmetic procedure in cosmetic dentistry practices across the nation, said Austin, who also recommended either porcelain veneers or clear removable braces such as Invisalign or Clear Correct to make Freeman’s teeth straighter.

Another celebrity who could show improvement, Austin said, was Miley Cyrus. While the teen superstar has an “overall nice smile,” Austin noted that her teeth appeared to be a bit asymmetric as one front tooth actually hangs a tiny bit lower than the other.

Austin recommends that a simple procedure such as tooth recontouring or perhaps redoing the upper front veneers will put the smile of the popular singer and actress back on the A-list.

Austin, who is based in New York City, calls herself a “celebrity dentist.” Her goal is to offer her patients Hollywood-inspired smiles.