ADA apology reinforces diversity commitment

The American Dental Association (ADA) recently acknowledged that it deeply regrets not taking a stronger stand against discriminatory membership practices during the pre-civil rights era.

ADA President Raymond Gist, DDS, said making the announcement public reinforces the ADA’s commitment to a diverse and inclusive profession, moving us forward in a new spirit of collaboration to advance the dental profession and the oral health of the public.

“In looking forward, we also must look back,” stated Gist, the first African American to serve as ADA president. “Along with acknowledging past mistakes and to build a stronger, more inclusive platform for future accomplishments, the ADA apologizes to dentists for not strongly enforcing nondiscriminatory membership practices prior to 1965. These are not my words alone — they embody a resolution adopted by the ADA Officers and Board of Trustees.”

Improvements in diversity

Gist said that in the 45 years since he was a dental student, there have been improvements in the diversity of the dental profession, membership and leadership of the ADA, and in initiatives to reduce disparities in the public’s oral health.

He said that although doors have been opened, more can be done to encourage careers in dentistry, citing enrollment in U.S. dental schools not keeping pace with the growth of underrepresented minorities in the U.S. population.

Gist explained that U.S. Census Bureau data indicate in 2009, African Americans and Hispanic Americans each totaled about 12.9 percent and 15.8 percent of the U.S. population, respectively. Yet, ADA survey data for the 2008/2009 school year indicate only about six percent of dental students were African American and six percent were Hispanic American.

Gist also noted that when it comes to the oral health of the public, African Americans and Hispanic Americans suffer higher rates of dental diseases.

Earlier this year, the National ADA apology reinforces diversity commitment
a special look at unique nutritional issues as people age, and an exploration of the connection between the mouth and the body. Sprinkled throughout the site is trivia about historic objects from the National Museum of Dentistry’s collection, such as the real story behind George Washington’s “wooden” teeth.

The unique oral-health issues of older adults is quickly becoming a priority as the U.S. population age 65 and over is anticipated to increase from 40 million in 2010 to 55 million in 2020 (a 36 percent jump), according to the U.S. Administration on Aging. People are also living longer, averaging 18 years after age 65.

“We want this growing segment of the population to become more aware of their health needs and the importance of good oral health,” said National Museum of Dentistry Executive Director Jonathan Landers. “Get MouthPower is an engaging resource for older adults to learn about changing oral-health issues and options specific to their age group. The more you know, the healthier and happier your golden years will be.”

The web resource covers several main topical areas:

• **Your Sparkling Smile:** A great smile is possible at any age. Oral-health tips will help older adults keep their smiles in top condition, including how to address emerging mobility and dexterity issues, how to care for implants and dentures, and how to be prepared for dental visits.

• **About Your Mouth:** Our mouth is constantly changing as we age, including changes in tooth color and enamel, gum tissue and sensation. Find out what’s going on, and what can be done about tooth loss, dry mouth and more. Plus, take a risk assessment for oral cancer.

• **Fit to Eat:** Nutritional needs change at every stage of life. Check out these food tips to boost health, including a calculator to measure daily calcium intake and an entertaining nutritional boxing bout between your favorite foods.

• **The Mouth/Body Connection:** Your mouth and body are interconnected. Learn about the connection between oral health and overall health, and how periodontitis can affect heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

• **Interactive Timeline:** An interactive oral-health timeline that shows how a visit to the dentist has changed over the years, how dentistry has influenced pop culture, how toothbrushes and concoctions for a sparkling smile have evolved through the ages, and who are some famous and infamous dentists.

Get MouthPower was created by the National Museum of Dentistry. It was made possible by the financial support of Colgate-Palmolive.

(Recipe: National Museum of Dentistry)

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**Dental Association (NDA), Hispanic Dental Association (HDA), the Society of American Indian Dentists and the ADA held the first National Summit on Diversity in Dentistry.**

They described current initiatives to improve diversity in the profession and leadership, and to reduce population disparities in oral health status. The presidents of the four organizations also committed to continuing their dialogue, focusing on oversight of current and future collaborations.

The ADA has a number of programs and activities devoted to inclusion such as the Institute for Diversity in Leadership, which provides a diverse group of dentists with education and experience to set new leadership paths within the profession and their communities; the Student Ambassador Program; and the Council on Dental Education and Licensure’s Career Guidance and Diversity Activities Committee (Committee D). Committee D is comprised of 14 members, including representatives of the NDA, HDA and the Society of American Indian Dentists.

“The more our profession reaches out and makes everyone — from every walk of life and with every career ambition — feel welcome, the more talented our next generation of dentists will be,” Gist stated.

(Recipe: American Dental Association)