What does it mean to be scholarly?

By Dennis J. Tartakow, DMD, MEd, PhD, Editor in Chief

Q uoting Nathan Pusey’s “The Age of the Scholar” (1965), “We live in a time of such rapid change and growth of knowledge that only he who is in a fundamental sense a scholar — that is, a person who continues to learn and inquire — can hope to keep pace, let alone play the role of guide” (Howe, 2003, p. 19).

Dr. Pusey’s quote is almost 50 years old but is as important, if not more important, today as it was then. The concepts and principles for which his words stand for also apply to the goals and direction set forth by our orthodontic training programs.

To be scholarly and erudite requires a fundamental understanding of ethics or moral philosophy, which addresses questions about morality, justice and virtue. These concepts are clearly not (a) a matter of following one’s feelings, (b) identified with religion, (c) the same as following the law or (d) the same as doing whatever society accepts.

Most individuals accept standards that are, in fact, ethical. However, societal standards of behavior can deviate from what is ethical; an entire society can become ethically corrupt.

With these thoughts under the microscope, ethics must satisfy two concepts or principles:

- Ethics must refer to right and wrong — standards that prescribe what humans should do in terms of rights, obligations, fairness, specific virtues or benefits to society, such as standards that (a) impose the reasonable obligations of values that include obeying virtues of honesty, compassion and loyalty; and (b) relate to rights, such as the right to life, freedom from injury and privacy. Consistent, well-founded reasoning supports these ethical standards.

- Ethics must refer to the study and development of moral standards — feelings, laws and social norms that deviate from what is considered to be ethical. It is necessary to continually examine one’s standards to ensure they are well founded and reasonable. It also means the continuous effort of studying our own moral beliefs and not just accepting, striving to ensure that we and the institutions we help to shape live up to standards that are reasonable and solidly based.

According to Webster’s Online Dictionary (2010), there are many other applied definitions, explanations and descriptions of scholarly communication. In general, scholarly communication is an umbrella term illustrating the process of academic, intellectuals and researchers publishing and contributing their findings to the wider academic community and beyond. It is simply the creation and dissemination of knowledge related to research, education and erudite endeavors.

There has been widespread belief that the dissemination of scholarship in the traditional system has reached a state of crisis in recent years, which has also been referred to as the publishing crisis (UConn Libraries Spring Forum, 2008).

Such concepts must be encouraged and promoted as goals and directions for all students in colleges and universities. Our orthodontic residents in undergraduate, postgraduate or continuing education must also be encouraged to seek these principles of scholarship to maintain quality guidelines and to improve the standards of orthodontic education.

References

Ortho Tribune strives to maintain the utmost accuracy in its news and clinical reports. If you find a factual error or content that requires clarification, please report the details to Managing Editor Kristine Coaker at k.colter@dental-tribune.com.