A family affair

What motivated you to become an orthodontist?

My father and grandfather were both exceptional orthodontists. As a young person, I was tremendously influenced by their larger-than-life personas and recognized that orthodontics was an important part of their lives. I could not resist the lure of becoming a third-generation orthodontist.

When and how did you open your orthodontic clinical practice?

I joined my father’s orthodontic practice seven and a half years ago. The practice had been in its present location for approximately 24 years.

What special areas are you interested in and why?

I have spent the last decade looking at the lineaments of the social smile and anterior tooth display. Patients seek orthodontic treatment in order to improve their appearance and in particular their smile. Through the use of digital videography, we have been able to assess the impact of orthodontic treatment on smile characteristics. As we look to the future, three-dimensional dynamic imaging will allow orthodontists to meticulously plan and execute treatment geared toward smile enhancement.

What is the name of the institution(s), your rank and title, in which you are affiliated?

Associate Professor and Coordinator of Evidence-Based Education, Jacksonville University School of Orthodontics; and Clinical Associate Professor, Kornberg School of Dentistry, Temple University.

What are your most important educational responsibilities to your postgraduate orthodontic residents?

For the past five years at Temple, I have directed the course in advanced clinical examination and diagnosis and treatment planning. My most important role has been supervising the residents in the clinic while they carry out treatment of patients.

Besides orthodontics, what other areas of interest are you involved in?

I most enjoy spending time with my wife Vanessa and my daughter Olivia. As well, I am an avid squash and tennis player.

In your opinion, is there a need to change the methods of how postgraduate orthodontic programs educate their residents here in the U.S.?

Yes, I believe orthodontic education in the U.S. requires modernization. The average residency program is teaching material that is outdated and has little relevance in contemporary orthodontic practice. For instance, many programs devote countless hours to conventional cephalometric radiography. With the advent of cone-beam CT imaging and conventional CT imaging, the role of the 2-D plane film should be questioned. I think the larger question here is who should ultimately be responsible for determining the competence of orthodontic residents – university faculty or the American Board of Orthodontics? I believe that the orthodontic faculties are in a much better position to evaluate the academic portfolio of their residents and can make a more reasoned determination of clinical competence.

What changes in orthodontic education have you observed that are either positive and/or negative?

I am a firm believer in the two-year orthodontic residency. I think that the trend toward three-year programs is a negative change for several reasons. Most importantly, it runs counter to our ability to teach residents proper time management. I would guess that residents successfully finish more cases knowing that they only have 24 months to do so, versus having an overabundance of time.

What changes in orthodontic education would you like to see made and why?

I would like to see greater emphasis on developing a credentialing process during orthodontic residency that comprehensively evaluates the resident. A resident should graduate with a portfolio that grades them in the areas of didactic knowledge, clinical ability, chairside manner, decision-making acumen, and ethical compass. Once the residency, the resident should be able to build on this basic portfolio and attain successive levels of expertise over time. So we need to establish an American Academy of Orthodontics that fosters lifelong learning and assists clinicians in the pursuit of self-improvement. Currently, the certification process in orthodontics falls short of achieving these lofty goals.

Please recount the most interesting part of your personal journey in orthodontics.

I must say that I was blessed to practice several years with my father. He is a fountain of orthodontic knowledge and history. Through his orthodontic sphere, I have met many orthodontic legends. I think that my favorite vignette occurred at the AAO meeting in Philadelphia in 2002. Bob Ricketts was coming down an escalator in the convention center and yelled to my father, “Hey Ackerman… you’re supposed to be the next Ricketts.” Dad exclaimed back, “Which Ackerman?”

What closing remarks would you like to make?

Thank you for taking the time to interview me.

Ortho Tribune would like to thank Dr. Ackerman for donating his time and effort, and for sharing his expertise with us!