Interview: ‘A time of unprecedented change in our profession’

Robert S. Roda, DDS, MS, president of the American Association of Endodontists (AAE), runs a private endodontic practice in Scottsdale, Ariz., and serves as a visiting lecturer at the Arizona School of Dentistry and Oral Health and as an adjunct assistant professor at Baylor College of Dentistry in Dallas.

In an interview, he discusses his background, those who influenced him most in his career, his passion for diagnosing and treating patients and the latest initiatives of the AAE.

Please introduce yourself to our readers. What is your background, and where do you work?

I graduated from university and dental school at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and worked there for 10 years as a general dentist. I returned to do my endodontic residency at Baylor College of Dentistry in Dallas, where I received my MS, and began private endodontic practice in Scottsdale, Ariz. I became very active in the Arizona Dental Association, the American Dental Association and the AAE. I went through the board process and became a diplomate of the American Board of Endodontics in 1998.

I have lectured extensively, published in dental journals and am the mentor for the East Coast Endodontic Study Club in Nova Scotia. I have always wanted to give back to my profession and the patients we serve, so for me it is not work but a very enjoyable part of my career.

The AAE recently launched a new Root Canal Safety website. How do you work to educate the public and the profession about endodontics?

False claims that root canals cause cancer or other diseases are circulating on the Internet, and the AAE offers tools to help endodontists and other dental professionals talk to patients who may have read this misinformation and have questions. It’s important that we provide authoritative and reliable information about the safety of endodontic treatment, while debunking myths that root canal treatment causes health problems. Resources are available at www.aae.org/rootcanalsafety.

We also provide patient education, information and clinical resources to support saving the natural tooth. We recently released new treatment videos that help patients understand endodontic procedures and hopefully steer them to an endodontist for treatment. You can view them at the AAE’s YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/rootcanalspecialists.
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### Program details

**WORKSHOP**

- Breakfast
- Introduction and History (1 hour)
- Case presentations (1 hour)
- Instruments (1 hour)
- Hands-on (1 hour)
- Lunch
- Case presentations (1 hour)
- Hands-on (2 hours)
- Tips and Tricks (1 hour)

### ONLINE LEARNING

- Anatomy (3 hours)
  - Kianor Shah
- Biophysics, Classifications, Pre-Operative Preparation (1 hour)
  - Kianor Shah
- Pharmacology (2 hours)
  - Gregory Greenwood
- IV sedation, Socket Grafting and Suturing Techniques (2 hours)
  - Gregory Greenwood
- Medical Emergencies (1 hour)
  - Gregory Greenwood
- Surgical Techniques and Post-Operative Care (1 hour)
  - Kianor Shah

**Lecture & Hands On Workshop**

**18 CE Credits**

### Extraction Academy Mini Residency Series (34 CE) Course Registration

**Advanced Extraction Techniques**

- Online Series (10 CE hours)
- Hands-On Workshop (8 CE hours)

- Course Fee: $1,500

**All Inclusive Live Surgical Training**

- Live Surgical Training (16 CE Units)
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- Course Fee: $3,500

**Combined Program Fee:** $5,400

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Archimedes of Syracuse (c. 287 BC – c. 212 BC)

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Extraction Academy courses are designed around practical hands-on lectures. Courses start with extraction basics and progress to advanced techniques. This allows attendees to go back to their office and immediately implement the techniques learned from Extraction Academy lectures and add more revenue to their practices.

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Robert S. Roda, DDS, MS

The AAE website, www.aae.org, also has valuable clinical information to help educate practitioners in areas like case assessment, treatment planning, traumaic dental injuries and other issues that impact patient care.

What else is new at the AAE?

One of our newer programs is the Cracked Tooth Initiative. Cracked teeth are becoming a modern epidemic that is robbing people of otherwise perfectly good teeth. So little is truly known about it that we are left with few options to help retain the tooth. Our initiative will facilitate the opening of new venues of research, with the long-term goal of eliminating cracked teeth as a cause of tooth loss.

On a personal note, what do you like best about the specialty of endodontics?

I have always been intrigued by diagnosis. It’s like a complex puzzle, but it is real-time, it’s important and this patient’s health depends on my efforts. What is this patient feeling? What is causing it? What should I look for? What tests do I need? Over the years, by a combination of formal education and close observation of patients, I have developed a skill set that helps me to diagnose a patient’s problem. This is the skill set of the endodontist.

We are the diagnosticians of the teeth and surrounding structures, and — along with performing root canal therapy at the highest level (which I also enjoy doing) — this is the cornerstone of our type of practice.

Who influenced you most in your career?

I studied at Baylor under three of the four people who had the greatest influence on my endodontic career. From Dr. Jack Harrison, I learned to be a critical thinker. From Dr. Jerry Glickman, I learned how to get things done efficiently and well. Finally, from Dr. Jim Gutmann, I learned the value of putting all of the information (and there were volumes of it) together, adding what’s new, and applying it to unique situations in patient care.

The fourth person who had a large influence on my career was Dr. Jim Kramer, who was the first endodontist to graduate from Baylor’s program and the first endodontist I worked with. His combination of hard work, caring about others and knowledge on how to run a patient-centered practice has left me with enduring attitudes and philosophies that I pass on to any who will listen. He knew, as I did, that if all of your clinical decision-making was about what is best for the patient, that everything else would fall into place.

Is there something that people might be surprised to know about you?

I grew up all over the world. My father worked for Trans World Airlines, and I was born in Paris, bounced around the United States through junior high, went to high school in Germany at the Frankfurt International School, and attended university and dental school in Canada. I’m a third culture kid, and I am as comfortable in a restaurant in a foreign country where no one speaks English as I am in a fast-food joint in Chicago.

With all of this travel, I learned to never make snap judgments about people. Everyone has a different point of view based on different cultural, religious and historical experiences, but deep down inside, we all have similar basic needs. I’ve learned to try to understand what is below the sometimes-strange surface of people to see what it is they are made of. Some of my most long-term friendships started that way.

Do you have anything you would like to add?

It is a time of unprecedented change in our profession. Economic, demographic and political...
forces are colliding to reshape the practice environment for America’s dentists. Dental spending by patients is flat. Alternative methods to clinical delivery are consuming a growing part of the dental market share each year. Reimbursements from third-party payers are expected to continue to decline. And students are leaving dental schools with extremely large debts. Managing these changes by ourselves would be impossible, but we don’t have to face this alone, because the AAE offers help and resources that span a wide spectrum.

It gives me a great sense of encouragement to see that my association is so engaged in all the facets of my specialty. Coupled with the work of the ADA and its tripartite system, the AAE gives us the tools and information and action to help us help ourselves navigate these stormy waters.

Understanding change in the environment, embracing change in our membership and creating change in how we do things are among the hallmarks of a successful organization, and the AAE is a successful organization.

I am honored to serve as its president.