

Guest Editorial

Why some clinical faculty members do not perform research

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Discussions seem to arise more and more frequently about why some full-time dental faculty members do not undertake any research. While many of the faculty do accomplish significant research, others do not participate in any kind of scientific investigation. For the sake of brevity, the term *research* will include both funded research and pure scientific investigation of a clinical or laboratory nature.

There are four basic reasons that many full-time clinical faculty members avoid research. First, many of these people have not been trained in research grant procedures; they should not be expected to write grant proposals, bring in large amounts of grant support, or accomplish sophisticated research.

Second, others have not been trained to do clinical research; however, since uncomplicated, comparative, short- and long-term clinical evaluations are neither difficult to establish nor arduous, these faculty members could still make research contributions.

Many schools do not have courses in research or grant writing in the undergraduate dental curriculum. As long as dental schools continue to have overcrowded four-year curricula, it is unlikely that education in research methodology will be added. Dental students who are interested in research can usually find a faculty member mentor with whom to work and study. Some dental schools have work-study programs that include opportunities for students to work as research assistants and earn financial support.

Some faculty members who are hired as full-time teachers are not able to do scientific investigation without additional training. Many, although not all, residency programs do include scientific investigation or research participation in their requirements for completion. Graduates of these residency programs are better prepared for a role as a full-time faculty member who will be expected to teach and contribute to the scientific literature.

A third way that some members of the clinical faculty avoid research is by claiming that they do not have enough time. If this is true, then departmental chairpersons must find research time for their faculty. If there is a true shortage of faculty, then it is the responsibility of the chairperson or dean to provide sufficient personnel. However, time and available assistance should not determine whether or not a faculty member performs clinical scientific investigations. Projects can be tailored to fit the available time and ancillary help.

Finally, some faculty members are just not interested in research and refuse to participate. They should be reminded that research and academic progress go hand in hand. Those who truly understand the relationship of scholarship, research, and teaching should encourage their colleagues to participate.

Only apathy prevents some clinicians from sharing their experiences. Departmental chairpersons and deans of dental schools should strongly urge faculty members to overcome inertia and produce. The publication of clinical case reports is one way of conveying new or interesting information so that peers may benefit. New or different kinds of patient treatment experiences are frequently excellent examples of the kinds of scientific investigations that should be reported in the literature. Unusual or infrequently reported surgical cases or techniques would also be useful to many others in the profession if more clinicians would take the time to document their cases.

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Similarly, new restorative materials and techniques should be described and explained so that others may learn. No one advocates the publication of techniques and research that are already reported in the literature. However, with the daily introduction of new materials and techniques, particularly in the area of restorative dentistry, there is a wealth of new information to be spread. It should be considered obligatory for every full-time dental faculty member to report new scientific investigation in his or her area of expertise in an appropriate dental journal.

We have all heard or used the cliché "publish or perish" about higher education. Survival should not be the reason for having a paper published, nor should it be one of our educational goals. Every full-time faculty member should feel a moral and ethical obligation to perform some type of scientific investigation, whether it be clinical or laboratory studies. Our goal should be to "publish and prosper."

There may be a need for some full-time clinical faculty members who only teach and do nothing to advance the body of scientific knowledge. However, these teachers should not progress beyond the rank of assistant professor and, unless they possess unusual talents, should not receive tenure.

Whether the faculty members like it or not, in most dental schools promotion is tied to publications. In some dental schools, a few-to-several publications (in refereed journals) are required for promotion to the rank of associate professor, and several-to-many publications are necessary for promotion to the rank of full

professor. However, this is not the case at all institutions, which may create a problem for faculty members wishing to move to another school.

Some schools have no specific publication requirements for promotion. Is it possible that these schools do not consider scientific investigation and research important enough to be part of a full-time faculty member's life? Prospective full-time dental faculty members should be told during the interview process exactly what is expected of them, and this should include the performance of some type of scientific investigation and publication.

Although the cliché "publish or perish" should not be the sole motivation of dental faculty members, some teachers only try to publish to retain their job. If there are publication requirements for academic promotion — and there should be — then failure to publish will result in failure to be promoted. These failures may result in loss of esteem, loss of salary increases, and even in loss of position.

"Publish and prosper" should be our goal and our motto. Scientific investigation resulting in new knowledge important enough for publication in refereed journals will surely raise self-esteem and bring prosperity. Publications of a valuable scientific nature are not only helpful in academic promotion, but also serve as examples to others because they demonstrate academic and research progress. A good faculty can teach dental students — a great faculty will teach dental students and also conduct scientific investigation.