

Challenging Jobs and Professional Responsibility

While driving to work recently I heard a song on the radio titled "EDAJTC." My first reaction was that we have taken acronyms too far, as this one is so confusing that it would require a meeting with the cryptographer to decode it. Nonetheless, I did listen to the lyrics and found that the letters originated from the chorus, "everyone deserves a job that's challenging."

It's a rather interesting comment on life that we should all be challenged by what we do, especially what we choose to do as a profession. When considering a life's work, we often think about a profession that will be interesting, intellectually stimulating, rewarding and, yes, challenging. Of course, these considerations are made before we truly understand the nuances of professional activities. It is almost inevitable that it happens this way, because there are so many intricacies in professional activities, and observation of professionals in action only serves to provide a superficial understanding of the requisite activities. The situation is harder when we choose a profession that demands specific technical skills, a profession such as dentistry.

Returning to the song on the radio, I found that the next line was more intriguing yet. It was "although they may not ever get it right." It's not that I search the radio for inspiration, but sometimes inspiration is found in unusual places. In this instance the second line was the telling one.

In the dental profession we need to consider the desire for a challenge as being secondary to the responsibility to provide the best possible care for the patient. As professionals we understand the trust that patients place in our abilities and must ensure that this trust is never violated. This means that we must critically appraise our skills and recognize our limitations.

Osseointegration became the standard of care in implant dentistry when the profession recognized that the experiences of a few could be duplicated by many if a series of procedures was followed with something akin to religious fervor. Dogmatic adherence to a specific methodology demonstrated that the clinical results described by scientists could also be achieved in routine practice. With time the original techniques were modified, streamlined, and simplified, eventually leading to methods that are used today.

Every issue of JOMI provides the reader with data that should serve as benchmarks for the reader's clinical practice. By comparing their own experiences with those documented in this and other journals, clinicians can compare their individual success rates to those reported by the journal authors.

This is where the song on the radio intrigued me. Clinicians must only accept a challenge that they can also conquer. The trust between patients and clinicians includes the patient's faith that the clinician is totally in command of the treatment. Perhaps an analogy would help. When I sit in an airplane, I trust that anything that happens to that plane will be handled by the pilots with total confidence and skill. I certainly don't want the pilots to be challenged; I trust them to be able to defeat any challenge before them.

We see many challenges in implant dentistry. Tracking the sequence of patient appointments and ensuring that the appropriate components are on hand at the appropriate time can prove problematic. From difficult surgical techniques to complex prosthetic designs, there is a challenge for everyone. As research provides new treatment approaches and industry markets every new technique as an improvement on current methods, we must constantly refocus on the need to critically appraise our knowledge, skills, and desire to move away from current comfort zones and into new areas.

And so it is in implant dentistry. We must provide care that is within our own skill set. Science will broaden the horizons, and it is our responsibility to be aware of these developments by studying the information that is available to us through sources like this journal. Likewise it is our responsibility to introduce those new methods that we can perform with results similar to those reported in the literature and which truly benefit our patients. New opportunities certainly exist, but we always need to be aware of the limitations associated with the new methods. Clearly we should not do something just to be challenged if the results fall short of those that can be achieved with routine procedures. Conversely, we should not shy away from advancements simply because mastery of them demands the investment of time and effort. So, although we may deserve a job that's challenging, unlike the song, we absolutely must get it right, and doing so is the rewarding part of being a professional.

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