



# Case for Support

November 1, 2006

## The Vision

**Dental Education: Our Legacy – Our Future** is a national awareness campaign for dental education to promote and sustain excellence in dentistry through a strong dental education system. Achieving this vision is crucial. Dental education is responsible for upholding the integrity of dentistry as a trusted health care profession. The impact of realizing our vision will do nothing less than safeguard the future practice of dentistry and the well-being of the public's oral health. We must take urgent action now to do so.

The purpose of *Our Legacy – Our Future* is not to create another fundraising entity. In fact, *Our Legacy – Our Future* will not collect a single dollar of its own. Instead, it is designed to serve as a flexible support tool to raise awareness for the needs in dental education and to enhance the visibility for the fundraising campaigns of its partner organizations. As a result, it is estimated that by the end of 2014, partner organizations will collectively raise \$500 million to address the issues facing the future of dental education.

Dental education is the foundation from which all dentistry is built and sustained. It's the framework from which scientific findings and advancements in care are discovered and implemented. A strong dental education system produces a strong dental profession, resulting in the highest level of oral health care for the public. And as we move toward the future, researchers are proving a direct link between oral health and the overall systemic health of the body . . . making oral health care even more important to a healthy population.

All dental professionals are the product of dental education. Our dental schools mold future generations of dentists, giving them the knowledge, science, critical-thinking skills and ethical principles necessary to meet the nation's oral health needs. Dental schools are the home for research that leads to innovative treatments, technology and better ways to deliver care. These advancements are shared through dental schools' continuing education programs, so that practicing dentists and specialists can stay up-to-date on the latest scientific advancements in materials, instruments and techniques available to them. Finally, dental schools function as an important safety net for people in underserved communities, who would not have access to care if not for vital outreach efforts.

You have the unique opportunity to take action. Today's dental education system must be strengthened and made more dynamic. And it must happen now. It will require energetic leadership, support and a willingness to embrace needed change by the dental profession, the dental education community and beyond.

It will take a culture of philanthropy unlike anything we've seen to date in dentistry. A culture of individual pride, responsibility and support that comes from knowing it's up to each one of us to do our part. A culture where we set aside our differences, preconceived notions and traditional roles to enact meaningful change. Change that will make a real difference in our lives and in the lives of our patients.

## The Role of Dental Education in the Public's Oral Health

### **Access to Care for Everyone**

The future of the public's oral health depends on availability and access to dentists, specialists and dental scientists who advance and embrace the latest in care delivery. Our dental education system ensures this network of care exists.

Thanks to our current dental education system, most of us take for granted that a dental health professional is right around the corner, easily accessible whenever we need one. But for those living in remote rural or disadvantaged urban areas, this is not the case.

Dental schools not only ensure that we have qualified future generations of dental team members to serve the general public, but also provide critically needed care for patients who have no other access to oral health care. Through university dental clinics and outreach efforts to community-based clinics, dental schools play an important role in community care and instill a sense of responsibility and sensitivity to provide patient care to those in need.

Dental schools also possess a nucleus of tertiary care specialists who accept referrals, serving as a key resource for the practicing dental community. Continuing education programs offered by dental schools update the general practitioner and dental specialists, elevating the standards of dental care throughout the community.

### **Research and Advancements in Care**

Important research and clinical studies that have led to improved oral health care would not have been possible without dental schools. The level of research funding provided to dental schools by the National Institutes of Health and other federal agencies is a testament to the value placed on their efforts to advance science. Working together, dental schools within a larger academic health center or university campus and industry partners, can create an environment where research can flourish and grow into practical applications. This collaboration produces beneficial research that can seamlessly evolve into innovative products for use by the practicing community and their patients.

For the 21st Century, dental schools must have the capacity to conduct collaborative research across many disciplines and must be full and equal to participants in the medical research enterprise if oral health and craniofacial biology advances are to continue. Research capacity in dental schools must be addressed.

Developed through dental schools in alliance with the profession and with industry, innovative new products and equipment, such as fluorides, sealants, high-speed hand pieces and new anesthetics, have been created to help prevent dental problems and provide a quicker, virtually pain-free experience for the patient. Research has also led to advances in orthodontics, implants, and oral/facial reconstruction that improve a patient's self-esteem and daily functioning.

Dental schools provide the greatest potential to turn these clinical findings into practical application through their connections with students, practicing dentists, industry, community clinics and public-policy advocates. They not only serve as a source for new approaches and technologies, but also share that knowledge with others through updated curriculum and continuing education courses.

Consider what would happen if dental research was halted. Future advances looming on the horizon might never come to fruition. Imagine the positive impact on the public's health if dental researchers could develop a vaccine to prevent periodontal disease or discovered gene therapies to prevent oral cancers. What if dental researchers discovered a preventable link between periodontal disease and low-birth weight babies or found ways to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease through improved oral health?

These examples offer proof of the potential impact oral health will have on improving overall general health. The opportunity to find these connections through science and research is limitless.

## [Securing the Future of Dental Education](#)

There is a definite connection between dental education and improved public oral health. But in order for dental education to continue to play this vital role, we must ensure a strong supply of qualified, diverse dental students and faculty who have access to state-of-the-art teaching and research facilities. To do this, we must reevaluate and openly embrace innovative changes in dental school funding, curriculum, facilities and program structure to meet the changing needs of students, practicing dentists, specialists, researchers and the public.

You have a unique opportunity to take action to improve several key areas of dental education that challenge the future of a strong dental profession:

### **Faculty Shortages**

We face a faculty shortage and a lack of diversity among dental educators that has already begun to affect the quality of dental education. A scholarly and adequately sized full-time dental faculty is essential to appropriately train future generations of students. It's also necessary in order to sustain the current level of research, so that dental schools maintain their scientific standing in the university community.

Currently there are more than 280 full-time and 27 part-time vacancies, an average of nearly 6 vacancies per school. Among these faculties, only 5.1 percent are African American and 3.8 percent Hispanic, failing to reflect the diversity of the population.

There are several reasons for the shortage. Faculty salaries are increasing at an annual rate of just three percent, significantly lower than private practice. In the past, dental school retention efforts focused on preventing faculty losses to competing dental schools. Today, they focus on the loss of faculty to more financially attractive alternatives – mainly full-time, private-practice opportunities.

More than 55 percent of the current dental school faculty is 50 years of age or older and 24 percent are 60 years of age or older. Those who are retiring are not being replaced in sufficient numbers. Moreover, graduates leaving dental school with an abundance of debt are less likely to choose education over the more profitable world of private practice.

Attracting potentially high-earning dental specialists to a career in dental education also continues to be an issue. Well-trained, scholarly dental specialists will be increasingly important to help dental schools maintain first-class teaching facilities.

## **Diversity of Students**

Not only is diversity of the dental faculty important, we must also build a dental work force that reflects the cultural, racial and gender diversity of the nation in order to ensure adequate access to care for all. Because research shows that patients are more likely to seek a dentist of their own culture, minority populations are clearly under-served.

The current demographics of dentists in practice, research and education, and the student population who will eventually replace them, are not reflective of the nation's population. Enrollment of minority students has declined with African Americans making up only 4.7 percent of the total dental student population, and Hispanics representing only 5.3 percent. These percentages are well below the equivalent representation of these minorities in the United States.

There are several reasons for the lack of diversity. Dental education is among the most costly professional training programs. Dental schools have the highest per student educational costs on campus. And unlike medical schools, the majority of dental school costs can't be offset by hospitals associated with the university and are therefore passed directly on to the student.

While the cost continues to grow, federal and state support has declined dramatically in recent years. State appropriations began dropping in 1999 and have continued on this course. From 2002 to 2003, dental school tuition increased by close to 11 percent, while at the same time, state appropriations dropped by 2.6 percent. And dental school debt for students continues to accelerate at an unchecked pace and at a significantly faster rate than the real net income of practicing dentists. According to a 2004 ADEA Survey of Dental School Seniors, average public and private school student graduating debt was \$122,000.

The result? Dental education is becoming unaffordable at a time when more dentists are needed to serve the population. Tuition costs and post-graduate debt may prevent talented students from lower-income families and under-represented minorities from pursuing dental careers. The cost issue is also a barrier for graduates to choose dental education over a more lucrative private-practice career. Practice opportunities to provide care in under-served areas are also significantly impacted by the need to cover educational debt.

Diversity is also affected by a lack of role models in the profession and mentoring programs to encourage African American and Hispanic students to pursue dentistry. We need to develop targeted outreach and recruitment efforts that attract minority students early on in their educational careers. In order to avoid the critical shortage of dental school applicants that was seen in 1989 and to assure a diverse mix of dentists and specialists, these issues must be addressed.

## **Innovative Education Models**

The physical facilities and infrastructure in which dental education is delivered must also be considered, since the majority of dental schools are close to 40 years old. Capital improvements, such as building renovations, updated equipment, and new wiring to accommodate the latest technologies are needed. Dental schools are having a difficult time keeping pace with today's escalating technological advancements. It has gotten to the point where students are graduating with a level of knowledge of technology and equipment that's already obsolete in the field.

Dental schools have done their part to provide innovative learning experiences through technology, such as long-distance learning, clinical simulation, and computer-assisted modules, but clearly more is needed to lower the cost of education to secure its place on university campuses.

Operating costs for dental schools are among the highest on university campuses, and investment by universities in their dental schools has failed to keep pace with the need. Unlike medical schools, where scientific and clinical costs are shared with local hospitals, dental schools are on their own to cover these expenses. If the situation is not addressed, our dental schools will be in jeopardy.

Innovative models of education delivery should be considered, including revised curricula, incentive/recognition programs for faculty, regionalized resources for dental schools, teaching training programs, new faculty practice models, improved accreditation processes, modified length of required training and clinical time, use of electronic teaching technology and strengthened research and scholarly activities.

The innovation that has begun in our dental schools must continue. Our dental education system is the best in the world, but if we don't address these issues, the future of dentistry is at risk. Of course funding is an answer, but without getting to the root cause of some of these issues to refocus and strengthen how dental education is delivered, we won't effectively address the need.

## The Solution: Collaboration and Philanthropy in Dentistry

It is clear that the challenges facing dental education in America can not and will not be adequately addressed with anything less than a national response. *Our Legacy – Our Future* is such a response and a much needed call to action. With the full support of the practicing and academic dental communities, as well as others, the future of dental education and the integrity of dentistry as an honored health care profession can be secured.

The issue of dental education is a complex one with many opinions as to possible solutions. It is clear that members of the dental community must work together to find solutions to these challenges and find funding for those solutions. An effort of this magnitude will require the dedication, determination and cooperative spirit of the entire dental profession. We must work together to complement each other's efforts vs. competing against them.

The American Dental Association Foundation has resolved to work side-by-side with its partner organizations and the dental profession overall to create *Our Legacy – Our Future*. Each partner in this national effort will raise its own funds to address the issues affecting dental education in their specific organization. Together, the partners in this national effort hope to raise \$500 million. *Our Legacy – Our Future* itself is NOT a fundraising entity; it IS a national effort to raise awareness and to support the partners in their individual fundraising campaigns. We seek to support the work currently being done in dental education, as well as inspire innovative new approaches.

*Our Legacy – Our Future* puts the donor in the driver seat. It lets each donor decide how to provide support for dental education, whether through short-term innovative program grants or longer term endowments. Whether it's a program that supports research, student diversity or addresses faculty shortages. Whether it's a campaign led by a university, the American Dental Association Foundation, or other dental associations.

No matter where the support goes, our collective goal is to engage and motivate donors to join us in securing the future of dental education.

As organized dentistry approaches a project of this magnitude, it does so with the clarity of purpose to sustain the integrity of dentistry as a profession by strengthening the future of dental education and the public's oral health. There is also a clear reality for practicing dentists whose professional future may be severely affected should these issues go unchecked. Should the community lose confidence in the dental profession because dentists fail to address these endemic issues, or if the government decides to intervene, there could be adverse economic as well as health consequences. Therefore, it's vital that we start within our own profession to proactively address these needs and build a culture of true philanthropy in dentistry.

However it's clear that the deterioration of our dental education system would have major societal health impact and therefore would be of interest to those beyond the boundaries of dentistry. We encourage organizations and individual donors who take a concerned interest in our nation's health to join this partnership to secure the future of dental education and ensure the oral health of our society for generations to come.



# Case for Support: Executive Summary

November 1, 2006

## The Role of Dental Education

The vision of *Dental Education: Our Legacy – Our Future* is to promote and sustain excellence in dentistry through a strong dental education system. Achieving this vision is crucial. Dental education is responsible for upholding the integrity of dentistry as a trusted health care profession. The impact of realizing our vision will do nothing less than safeguard the future practice of dentistry and the well-being of the public's oral health. We must take urgent action now to do so.

The purpose of *Our Legacy – Our Future* is not to create another fundraising entity. In fact, *Our Legacy – Our Future* will not collect a single dollar of its own. Instead, it is designed to serve as a flexible support tool to raise awareness for the needs in dental education and to enhance the visibility for the fundraising campaigns of its partner organizations. As a result, it is estimated that by the end of 2014, partner organizations will collectively raise \$500 million to address the issues facing the future of dental education.

Dental education is the foundation from which all dentistry is built and sustained. It's the framework from which scientific findings and advancements in care are discovered and implemented. A strong dental education system produces a strong dental profession, resulting in the highest level of oral health care for the public. Finally, dental schools are the safety net for people in underserved communities, who would not have access to care if not for these vital outreach efforts.

## The Need

But in order for dental education to continue to play this vital role, we must ensure a strong supply of qualified, diverse dental students and faculty, who have access to state-of-the art teaching and research facilities. You have a unique opportunity to take action to improve several key areas of dental education:

- Faculty shortages
- Student diversity
- Education delivery

## **Faculty Shortages**

We face a faculty shortage and a lack of diversity among dental educators needed to train future generations of students and to sustain the current level of research being conducted at our universities.

Reasons for the faculty shortage include loss of faculty to more financially attractive alternatives – mainly full-time, private-practice opportunities. In addition, more than half of current dental school faculty will retire in the next several years without younger dentists to replace them.

## **Student Diversity**

We must also build a dental work force that reflects the cultural, racial and gender diversity of the nation in order to ensure adequate access to care for all. The current demographics of dentists in practice, research and education and the student population, who will eventually replace them, are not reflective of the nation's population.

Reasons for the lack of diversity include the increasing cost of a dental education and lack of federal and state funding. Diversity is also affected by a lack of role models in the profession and mentoring programs to encourage African American and Hispanic students to pursue dentistry.

## **Education Delivery**

The physical facilities and infrastructure in which dental education is delivered must also be improved. Dental schools are having a difficult time keeping pace with today's escalating technological advancements. In addition, operating costs for dental schools are among the highest on university campuses, and investment by universities in their dental schools has failed to keep pace with the need.

To reverse this trend, innovative models of education delivery should be considered, including revised curricula, regionalized resources for dental schools and modified length of required training, to name a few.

## The Solution

It is clear that the challenges facing dental education in America can not and will not be adequately addressed with anything less than a national response. For this reason, the American Dental Association Foundation has resolved to work side-by-side with its partner organizations and the dental profession overall to create *Our Legacy – Our Future*.

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