



## Dental Research: Bane or Boon

Though every issue of the journal is special, this issue is particularly so because it contains the 2003 Annual Session Research Abstracts. Included are 49 abstracts of oral and poster presentation which will be presented this May at the annual session in New York City. The presentations, including the finalists for the graduate student research awards and the foundation research awards, report both basic and clinical science projects. The abstracts deal with a variety of topics such as dental materials, the use of lasers, tooth development, pathologic conditions, early childhood caries, quality of life issues, and the use of sedation. Many of the reports are the result of an accreditation requirement which mandates that all postdoctoral students in pediatric dentistry engage in original research projects. For many postdoctoral students, that stringent requirement is the *bane* of their existence during their time as students. They seek to be practitioners of pediatric dentistry and quite often they see little relevance in performing research. So why *are* students required to conduct research? Why not make that experience optional for interested persons? Why force future practitioners to complete research projects in order to be granted their specialty certificates?

There are a variety of reasons to perform research, yet these are not necessarily self-evident and are often appreciated only with the passage of time. Research experience is fundamental to the practice of pediatric dentistry. That experience teaches critical thinking, problem solving, and evidence evaluation – skills which are invaluable for practitioners. Moreover, not everything that is published is

worthwhile, and a student engaged in original research learns to distinguish the meaningful from the meaningless in what is written. Yet perhaps the most important justification for research activity is that it leads to new knowledge which ultimately improves patient care and the health of children. Research becomes a *boon* for our specialty and a pillar of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD).

The American Dental Association (ADA) has an established research agenda. It promotes research as a foundation of evidence-based practice. More than 50 unique areas for research are divided into issues related to the science of dentistry and issues related to the practice of dentistry. Of the more important research objectives related to science, there are studies of technique sensitivity of restorative materials, mechanisms of action of fluoride, dental remineralization, transmission of caries, and periodontal disease. Important research questions related to the practice of dentistry include the study of ergonomics to ensure the health of practitioners and the study of access barriers to oral health care. Whereas the ADA has a research agenda which is revised annually by its Council on Scientific Affairs, the AAPD does not yet have such an agenda. Our organization and the AAPD Foundation are committed to the promotion of research activity. Perhaps it is time for the AAPD to develop a research agenda specifically designed for pediatric dentistry. Such an agenda would be a *boon* to our mission as a specialty.

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