



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

“Evolution starts with education,” was what I was thinking as I read Dr. Mark Hughes column, “Reflecting on the past focused on the future” and Dr. Errol Khan’s column “Change.” Their columns are a way of opening the door to discussion of what we, as a profession and as individuals, are going to do to help guide the evolution of oral health care in our country.

I agree with both of them that either we will change or they will change it for us. Those of us who resist or try to go along with the herd will experience a “death of the old vision of general dentistry.”

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If you're not riding the wave of change...
you'll find yourself beneath it

As my wife Debbie and I were lucky enough to embrace the change 18 years ago, we see endless possibilities and unbridled growth for general dentists. We have learned that with the new extended life expectancy and the oral health and overall health connections, the need for the general practice dental office is ever increasing. Current repair-, tooth-by-tooth-, or smile-based approaches will be replaced by a more proactive “what can we do for the long-term oral and overall health of the patient”

approach. A paradigm shift from restorative dentistry toward “Tooth, Smile, Face” treatment plan options for each patient will be the new approach. Presenting the option of altering vertical dimension will become the norm. Restorations that address optimum periodontal and occlusal health will be the goal.

The demand for anti-aging facial esthetics and care for the long-term will skyrocket. General dentistry now sees patients for touch-up procedures as an afterthought following procedures by the dermatologist or plastic surgeon. With the tremendous effects of aging on the lower half of the face, the general practitioner should evolve to be the first consulted and not the last to obtain maximum results.

Each year our patients will live longer with diseases that would have killed them 10 years ago. Who will get them ready for the long haul of a longer life? The “new” general dentist!

We have always felt that general dentistry is the best profession for those who want it all. You can work your own hours, garner respect from our community, feel proud of being in the top 5 percent in education, and make a great living. But we need to embrace the “change” of our position as the hub of health care and leader of the community we serve. The time of changing our business models is here. The better we are able to create new practice/business models, the more professional we will remain.

As we have been lucky enough to personally experience the future of the general dentist over the last 10 years, we feel that, with all the needed oral health care now and in the future, the best is yet to come for those who embrace the change of the “new” general dentist! Enjoy the journey.

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