

Three Periods with Rich Rosato, DMD

Trustee, ADA First District

It seems like a lifetime ago, but March marks the tragic, one-year anniversary of the unofficial start of the COVID-19 pandemic in the US. Dental practices – like everyone else, unsure how the virus spreads – shut their doors out of an abundance of caution for both for our patients and our own employees; to alleviate stresses to the ER/hospitals and on PPE availability. It took a few months, but we did reopen safely with science on our side. Since those fateful days, dentists have been working nonstop, implementing safety protocols, getting caught up with backlogged patients and getting the dental team vaccinated. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, and although we do not know what the next “new normal” will involve, we know that the pandemic’s effects will undoubtedly help shape the next “new normal” to which we look with optimism. As your First District Trustee, I am pleased to share some developments that will help us plan for that positive next phase in organized dentistry.

FIRST PERIOD: From a dentist’s perspective, the practice transition process can be complex and emotional. Not only is the dentist planning the eventual sale of the practice he or she built over a period of years and even decades – he or she must also find a successor who will help maintain the legacy the practice has created when that individual takes over. Such a process can take years, but COVID-19’s economic impacts have accelerated the timetable for many, adding a layer of stress to the already sensitive process of practice transitions.

Fortunately, two years ago, ADA launched ADA Practice Transitions (ADAPT), which is designed to bring together would-be buyers and sellers in a cost-conscious and collegial, “culture of safety”, setting. Initially introduced in a handful of states, the program has quickly caught fire and gone national. This development means that associates and more established dentists have much greater access to one another. I am fortunate to have been appointed to ADA Business Innovation Group (ADABIG), which helps oversee the success of ADAPT on a national scale. This program is a benefit of Membership, helping to meet the needs of Member dentists in a user- and budget-friendly way. I encourage any dental practice owner considering handing over the reins to another dentist in the near- or not-too-distant future to explore what ADAPT has to offer.

SECOND PERIOD: A year ago, the ADA was one of the first groups in the country to study extensively the science behind the spread of the virus. Within two months, ADA – working with CDC and a wide range of other major institutions – brought to bear the infection control protocols and PPE guidelines that helped us reopen our practices

safely. A year later, that science remains up to date – only 2.1 percent of dentists and 3.1 percent of dental hygienists were infected by COVID-19, and there have been no incidents of dental office clusters.

Now, in light of the consistency in the science dental research has produced, we are called upon again to be the champions of reliable information when it comes to vaccines. Dentists are clinical professionals who must make sure they are vaccinated themselves and are available to vaccinate others. You may have heard my saying, “Get it, Give it, Share it!”. Recently, ADA and every state Society have taken an active role in sharing with state governments the value of utilizing these health care professionals as more and more vaccines become available. Furthermore, it is important that dentists, working with their patients, continue to act as reliable sources of information about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine. Just recently, ADA issued a toolkit that will help dentists better inform their patients about the vaccine and clear up any misconceptions about this important tool to reverse the course of this pandemic once and for all.

THIRD PERIOD: The last year has been marked with the decentralized administration of ADA and state Society operations. Boards, Houses of Delegates and Annual Meetings have since 2020 been conducted in online settings. However, we look with great anticipation to the fall, when we are scheduled to host our annual First District Caucus and ADA House of Delegates. The number-one question I get from state Societies is: “will we be traveling to Las Vegas in October?”.

Right now, SmileCon 2021 is on track to take place as expected in Las Vegas in October. However, the details on how that event will take shape remain somewhat unclear (as has been since last year, it is dictated by the state of the pandemic). You can rest assured, however, that ADA staff, Board members and dental leadership are working diligently to answer this critical question. In one way or another, we will hold the events in which dentists all over the country convene. As soon as this information becomes available, it will be announced.

As always, it is a great honor to serve as your Trustee!