

Dear ADA First District Leaders and New England Dentists:

A Call to Who We Are as Dentists

As we head into spring, I would like to take some time with you to reflect and ponder the growth and opportunities that come with this season and how those also apply to dentistry. Like many other large, national, professional organizations, the American Dental Association today stands at a crossroad. We find ourselves at this junction in part because of the natural evolution of our profession and, at the same time, the often divisive and politicized events that have taken shape on our national landscape. I take this moment, not tied to any particular event and as nothing more than a time to reflect, to remind us we are a “profession” comprised of dentists and teams. As such, we have earned respect over hundreds of years of representing love and compassion both in the chair and in our communities. In fact, our Code calls us out to be that example for all to see. I call on you to continue to be that example...to dispel hate and bigotry at every opportunity and to replace it with love, care, compassion, understanding and acceptance.

We are both dentists and citizens. This fact is not one of duality but rather complexity, with each part melded into one another. Take for example, how ADA dentists approach their art – it is not simply a matter of performing oral healthcare procedures. We make sure our patients are comfortable. We examine their overall physical condition. We talk with and reassure them. We project a visage that is both caring and professional. In fact, when one reads one of the ADA’s most sacrosanct documents – the ADA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct – it is clear that ADA dentists, and in fact all dentists through the Hippocratic Oath, commit to a mode of care that is clinically competent while also compassionate and respectful of others. I am always overwhelmed by our district in how we take this pledge so seriously.

The point of pausing at a crossroad is to consider the next step. For the ADA, that next step must focus on our Membership. To be sure, the high-profile events of the last few years – although they are not necessarily related to our ADA Mission Statement – do have an influence on this important step. As is the case in many other professions, dentists are far more diverse in race, gender, ethnicity, creed, orientation, and ideal than ever before. I cannot be more pleased about this fact – when I peer out at the 2021 House of Delegates in October, I look forward to seeing what I hope to be a landscape of this evolution.

Then again, when I look out at that diverse group, I must ask myself – as we all must ask – an important question: “Are these faces here together because of their respective demographics or because they are dentists?”. By asking this question, we can also look to the future with better clarity. I feel that dentists do not join the ADA because it offers any particular benefits of value to their ethnicity, orientation, gender or race; rather they join (and hopefully will continue to do so) because the ADA offers value to their career as a dentist. We should celebrate this diversity within the context that each of these faces is a dentist who is a part of our nationwide community.

When we ask this important question, it helps the ADA better focus its efforts on recruiting and retaining Members. One of our top-priorities must be to reverse the downward trend in Membership before it impacts our national standing. As a member of both the ADA Business Innovation Group and ADA Business Enterprises, I am part of a team of leaders who are looking critically at the benefits dentists need – financial services, equipment and more – so that what the ADA provides its Member dentists is exactly what they need to have success and provide care. We have for years tried to figure

out what each dentist needs from the ADA. I, somewhat uniquely, also feel it is critically important to tell both our current and prospective Members, "We need you!" Please join me in letting a colleague know that we are in this together and that the ADA needs them! I arrived at this thought by thinking of how it would feel to be told all the time what someone does for me and never told they need me. So share with all that they are needed for our profession to be whole!

The ADA is not a political organization and as such our legislative agenda is (and must continue to be) focused on the practice of dentistry and the patients we serve. As citizens, we are personally impacted by recent events and their sociopolitical underpinnings. However, as ADA dentists, we operate under a Code that can help us do far more than simply voice our anger on social media or similar venues. I invite each of you to review the five principles of our Code – patient autonomy, nonmaleficence, benevolence, justice and veracity -- within the context of what is going on in our world. The keys to how we can affect social change and foster diversity are available for all to see in our existing documents.

We have an imperative – to grow ADA in such a way that all dentists are welcome and needed. As ADA leaders and members, you and I have it within ourselves to accomplish this important directive. Together, as one dental community, we can do just that.

As always, it is an honor to serve as your Trustee.

Sincerely,

Richard Rosato, DMD
Trustee
ADA First District