



A Monthly Newsletter from Executive Director Richard W. Valachovic, D.M.D., M.P.H.

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Allow us to introduce this new member service, *Charting Progress*, a monthly letter from Dr. Rick Valachovic, Executive Director of the American Dental Education Association, to inform you about the issues addressed by ADEA and reasons they are important. Dr. Valachovic will begin by examining the topics of his recent [annual address to the membership](#): the changing demographics of our community, financial challenges to traditional dental education, and the knowledge explosion. This inaugural issue of *Charting Progress* spotlights the first of these. . . .



The Challenge of Changing Demographics

Oral Health as a National Security Issue - Sometimes the best way to see the present in sharp focus is to look at the past. In that spirit, I offer you the Civil War tale of the six opposable teeth. Six opposable upper and lower front teeth were what Civil War soldiers needed to bite off the ends of the paper gunpowder cylinders for their muzzle-loaded rifles -- and to do so under combat conditions. These were young men, average age 21, but many were sent home for want of six opposable teeth.

Most young and middle-aged people now expect to keep their natural teeth for a lifetime, and that has to count as chartable progress. But, shades of the five-toothed recruit, a quarter of the reservists in early-deploying National Guard units bound for Iraq had dental problems likely to require emergency care within a year, and some chose to have teeth extracted so that they could serve.

The condition of these recruits reminds us of seriously flawed access to oral health care, one piece of the demographic puzzle that challenges our dental education community. The underrepresentation of minorities is another part of the picture; the graying of the dental education faculty is a third. In fact, the challenge of managing changing demographics unites the communities of patients and practitioners, students and teachers. And there is much work still to be done.

The Values of a New Generation - Some part of improving access to care may lie in the mindset of a generation. If so, there is reason to hope for good things from the generation now entering dental school. These are the so-called Millennials, born after 1980 and raised to be inclusive and tolerant of others, to leave no one behind. They have been taught to serve their communities and to think in terms of the greater good. They are numerous and they are swelling the pool of applicants to dental schools, up 68 percent since 2001. Hard-working, team-oriented, and structured, they believe that multitasking is efficient, not inconsiderate. Imagine their surprise when their Boomer teachers don't share their positive view of such classroom activities as checking email, blogging, or viewing video on their cell phones! Learn more from "[Millennials Enter Dental School](#)," a presentation by ADEA's Dr. Anne Wells.

Our Role in Improving Opportunities - ADEA has long held that, without minority practitioners, there will be limited or no care in minority communities. According to the latest figures from our Associated American Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS), the numbers of underrepresented minorities applying to dental school have increased somewhat, but not at the pace of the entire applicant pool or enough to produce dental professionals proportionately with the U.S. population. Enrichment programs make a difference in getting students into the

enrollment pipeline. One such program is the new [ADEA and Association of American Medical Colleges' Summer Medical and Dental Education Program \(SMDEP\)](#), funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

And for background on why diversity improves the quality of education and what is needed to create a critical mass of diversity within dental schools and the dental profession, I recommend two articles from the *Journal of Dental Education*. They are "[Underrepresented Minority Dental School Enrollment: Continued Vigilance Required](#)" and "[Post-Affirmative Action Supreme Court Decision: New Challenges for Academic Institutions.](#)"

Addressing Concerns about Future Faculty Remains a Priority - On the faculty side, some progress: the number of vacant positions has decreased and the total number of faculty members has increased. Nevertheless, at least 30 percent of the faculty will retire over the next decade, and the situation with allied dental faculty is similar. ADEA's [Academic Dental Careers Network](#) is brimming with information about careers in academia, including videos, details of loan repayment programs, and answers to frequently asked questions. ADEA also has a new [Academic Dental Careers Fellowship Program](#).

And oh, yes, the history buffs among you should check out "[Highlights in the History of U.S. Army Dentistry.](#)"



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