



A monthly newsletter from Executive Director Richard W. Valachovic, D.M.D., M.P.H. The views and opinions expressed in this letter are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the American Dental Education Association.

*In this month's letter, ADEA Executive Director Dr. Rick Valachovic explains the thinking behind the ADEA Regional Accreditation Workshops and shares favorable reviews from early participants.*

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### **Preparing to Meet the New CODA Standards**

"Don't stop short!"

This was the challenge issued by Dr. Ken Kalkwarf to attendees at the first in a series of [ADEA Regional Accreditation Workshops](#) that ADEA is hosting throughout the United States. Designed to help schools get a handle on how they can demonstrate compliance with the latest standards put forth by the [Commission on Dental Accreditation \(CODA\)](#), the workshops offer strategies for promoting and assessing the competencies and institutional practices that pose the greatest challenges for many of our schools.

Ken, who was dental school Dean at the time and now serves as President ad interim of the [University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio](#), gave the keynote address to representatives of the 12 schools that gathered in San Antonio. Ken recalled that his dental school hosted a similar workshop when the last set of standards was introduced in the 1990s.

"Unfortunately, we were more concerned with the short term," he recalled. "We focused on how we could expedite this in the most effortless way, so we could all be successful in our accreditation." Ken urged the group gathered in San Antonio to take the long view this time around.

"The thrust of the last standards was competency," he reminded the audience, "so we created ways of evaluating individual components of competency. We made an assumption that if students could demonstrate success with each component, they could put them all together, but we didn't ask, 'Do students have across the board competency and the ability to be a safe, independent provider?' This is the opportunity to do what we should've done last time and really solidify our assessment of total competency."

I suspect everyone agrees with that statement, but getting there is easier said than done. That's why ADEA is encouraging dental schools to begin preparing now. The

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workshops offer a venue where individuals with responsibility for accreditation can share strategies, discuss best practices, and learn from leaders in the areas of faculty development, assessment, and curriculum. The workshops look at a wide range of topics from promoting a humanistic culture in dental education to assessing students' progress toward overall competency.

One of those in attendance in San Antonio was Dr. Anthony (Tony) Ziebert, Senior Vice President for Education/Professional Affairs at the [American Dental Association \(ADA\)](#) and Interim Director of CODA. The most recent revisions to the [standards](#), as submitted by the ADEA-CODA Task Force, were finalized while Tony was Director of CODA. He was able to bring a unique perspective to the workshop and was able to put many of the participants' questions in context. Tony sees the workshops as a place not only to gather information, but also to interact with others who will be in charge of accreditation at their schools.

“Even if an individual has a good understanding of the revised standards and a good understanding of the documentation that needs to be submitted in order to demonstrate compliance,” he told me, “the workshops are a great opportunity to share what is being done at your school and to get feedback on whether it will be an effective way to meet the standards.”

Tony has been gratified by the response to the standards so far. “I think everyone's rolling up their sleeves and really considering them very seriously,” he told me. “A lot of times, it is easier to complain and say, ‘We can't do this, or we won't do this.’ It's been the opposite in fact. People are expressing an appreciation and a realization that these changes needed to be made.”

That has been my impression as well. At the 2012 ADEA Annual Session & Exhibition and at the recent ADEA CCI Summer 2012 Liaisons Meeting, I heard lots of discussion on critical thinking, evidence-based practice, diversity, and life-long learning—competencies prominently featured in the new standards. While there is still plenty of anxiety around how schools will meet the standards, it's clear that a strong commitment to meeting them has spurred schools to action. Tony attributes this to the fact that CODA and ADEA were, in his words, “really out front early in communicating what these changes were going to be.”

If you read last month's [Charting Progress](#), you know what he's talking about. I think it's fair to say that ADEA and CODA worked hand in glove to develop the standards over the course of many years. As a result, the end product truly reflects a consensus effort.

“In the past,” Tony reminded me, “the self-study guide said, ‘This is how it is.’ Now the guide is really that—a guide with suggestions—and as people come up with new ways to meet the standards, those suggestions will be included.”

Ken Kalkwarf had a similar take on the collaborative nature of the process and its fluidity when we recently spoke. “The workshops are not going to create a cookbook that everybody's going to use, but they can create a mindset that we need to look at the long term, we need to look at what's best. Then individual schools need to experiment with innovative methodologies that truly evaluate the breadth of skills needed by a competent health professional.”

Or put another way, we all have something to contribute to this process. It's not just a matter of complying with an external authority or meeting the letter of the law. It's also about embracing the spirit of these reforms. That means developing practices that will enable all of us to meet our mutually agreed upon goals: to improve dental education so we graduate more competent professionals who, in turn, will provide better care.

Later this month, the second ADEA Regional Accreditation Workshop will be held in Indianapolis, Indiana. Schools in every region of the country will have an opportunity to attend a workshop sometime in the coming year, and there is no registration fee. If you haven't already done so, please check the [workshop brochure](#) to locate a workshop that is convenient for your institution.

I urge everyone to take advantage of this opportunity. The workshops may not provide a recipe for a problem-free accreditation process, but they are a terrific place to start.



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