

**THE SPECIALIST**

The specialist in prosthodontics does not do the same treatment that the general dentist does.

For each dollar spent, the patient will receive a uniquely different diagnosis, treatment plan and achievement of outcome. The results will be an unnoticeable, pleasing natural appearance, a function that is totally physiologic, and a measurable diminution of future breakdown, unless caused by disease or gross patient neglect. Specialists in prosthodontics have added these values for every dollar spent.

Specialists in prosthodontics can and will serve the needs of the patient with missing oral tissues in a unique and singularly different way. No one else is trained or has the skills to do the same treatments. Additionally, the specialist in prosthodontics will meet the needs of patients with missing tissues that cannot be restored further by surgery in a uniquely different manner. No one else is trained or has the skills to achieve the same results.

When the specialist in prosthodontics is not consulted or given the opportunity to meet these special needs, the public at large suffers. ndw

***A Letter to All Non-Boarded Trained Prosthodontists***

Dear Certificate Holder:

**Why is it personally important to you that you become a Diplomate of the American Board of Prosthodontics?**

**Why is it vitally important to the specialty that you become a Diplomate?**

**Why have you, fully trained in the specialty of prosthodontics, avoided the "Boards?"**

Your training signifies that you: have completed additional basic sciences; published research; had much added exposure in dental materials, maxillofacial prosthetics, treatment of patients with extreme oral tissue breakdown, and interdisciplinary solutions to severe dental problems; and yes, maybe you had a 3rd year of training, even before the added year was mandatory. To your credit!!

You did this for what reason? Why?

- To leave yourself in the same category as a general dentist; but with added training?
- To become definitely more skilled only to receive the same fee as the general dentist?
- To receive a "certificate" that means nothing to the general public that you serve?

If you received all of those exposures in your advanced training, and have not become boarded you have established that you are no different than the general practitioner. If you look carefully you will see big smiles on their faces when they look at you because they became your equal

without expending any of the time, money, or loss of life-stream income that you did. They will think "how stupid! Who would do that and why?"

You know in your mind that you do not do the same treatment as those general practitioners. Your treatment is quantitatively and qualitatively different. It has been proven in the literature that there is a statistically proven, evidence-based difference. These differences are to the patient's advantage, and probably are even very cost effective for the patient. You know that few if any general practitioners, even those who have gone through Panky Mann training, many continuing education courses, general practice residencies, or those qualified in some way in the Academy of General Dentistry can match your differences.

***Reason 1. to Look at Your Decision***

What you may not realize is that even you, the fully trained individual, are not at the knowledge or skill level of the Diplomate. Why? Because you have missed the 4th tier of training. [1st tier--college courses mainly in basic sciences; 2nd tier--dental school courses repeating basic sciences and adding clinical sciences; and 3rd tier--advanced education in prosthodontics repeating basic and clinical sciences and expanding information in both.]

What is the 4th tier of training? Reason out that all of your training has been "inflicted upon you" by others. You probably are tired of it and wish to be subjected to no more. But if you begin to study and prepare for the Boards, you will begin to learn from a "self-inflicted" discipline, and you will find it is more intense, longer lasting, and greatly more beneficial than any study you have done before.

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You will anchor down your treatment philosophies based on a much wider scope of the literature, and based on the best coalition of treatments that all of your postgraduate instructors imparted to you. After this 4th tier of study you will be quite certain that you are able to defend your positions based on the best of the literature and clinical experiences. How satisfying!

### Reason 2. to Look at Your Decision

Another compelling reason for you to look very closely at your decision to not take the Boards reflects on what you have "taken" but not "returned."

The American Board of Prosthodontics was established in order to recognize those who had received extra training in prosthodontics. The Board's purpose was to prove that those trained had reached a higher level of training than the level of training set for general practitioners. The standard of training for the specialty of prosthodontics was set, reviewed periodically and received approval by the American Dental Association. By doing so, the ADA recognized Prosthodontics as a specialty in dentistry.

This says the ADA publicly verifies the education process and the individuals completing it. The individuals who successfully test their education, called Diplomates, have proven that they comprehend the entire subject matter of the specialty and can manage established skill levels. The Diplomates are recognized as the body of individuals that can practice, teach, research, write and consult on a higher level than the general practitioner. In the eyes of the ADA and the public, Diplomates of the American Board of Prosthodontics are specialists.

Why is this process and history of its beginnings so important? They are very important because they insure that the public is protected by very specific guidelines. Guidelines resting in the training and testing

process and met by the individuals going through it and completing it. For the public's protection, the ADA must be assured that there is a recognizable standard that is being met by the specialty, and that it is not being met elsewhere or by any other group.

In recognition of all of the above, what forms is a "circle of mutual dependence" involving:

- the educating institutions
- the testing agency
- the profession's parent authority
- the public served

There is a definite obligation of the individuals challenging the process to complete it. Why? Because that is the only way the American Dental Association can guarantee that the specialty treatment the public requires (if they require it) is carried out by individuals meeting the standard. Keyword: guarantee.

Those individuals trained, but not tested cause a breakdown in this very carefully crafted circle of mutual dependence. Those individuals are in a never-never land. They do not help the education process and the institutions providing it because the education levels and treatments are not proven and not recognizable as "the standard." The institutions do not know if their product is meeting the standard. Likewise, individuals trained, but not tested, do not help the testing process and the agencies developing and conducting the tests. And they do not help people who may be in need of special treatment, because those people cannot recognize or be certain of the competency level of the provider.

There is a critically important potential danger in this breakdown of mutual dependence. Should the parent body of dentistry (the American Dental Association) decide that:

- there is no longer a viable advanced education process involving prosthodontics;
- the education process cannot be

proven as useful to the public and correct in level of training;

- those trained do not deem it necessary to be tested to function in dentistry;
- there are no longer adequate numbers of boarded specialists to meet the public's need for specialty treatment; and
- certain unique and special treatment needs of the public are being met by providers not boarded in prosthodontics

then the parent body will do away with the education process, the testing of the process, and the recognition of the specialty. There will be no specialty of prosthodontics!

Losing the specialty is a very real and ever present danger. You who trained, but have not become boarded have taken every advantage of the education system; and you have relied upon the standards that have been set by the certifying agencies. When you don't verify by testing what you have accomplished, you have failed in your obligation to keep the system viable. You took, but you didn't return!

### Reason 3. to Look at Your Decision

And finally, a last compelling reason to reach Diplomate status: When you complete the process, you will have great pride in yourself and be much more certain that your education (years and money) has been worth your efforts. This is not an exercise to prove yourself better than others in the profession. In fact it becomes abundantly clear very early in the board preparation process and through the testing phases that in order to be successful, humility is absolutely necessary. But it is an exercise to prove that you are as good as the best in your specialty. It tells you "They've done it; I've done it!" You have risen to a plane that puts you equal with equals. No apologies necessary -- you've made it! Again, how satisfying!

Remember: You have trained; you are ready. Only you can take a first step toward this goal. □ *Now read on >*

### *"Taking the Boards"*

Beyond the various stages of formal advanced training we have tended to emphasize "taking the Boards." Formal courses have been developed to assist in this objective (the Michigan course, the American College of Prosthodontists board preparation course, military services review courses, and others.) Examiners of the American Board of Prosthodontics graciously give of their time to appear, present and discuss all aspects of taking the Boards to groups, individuals and professional organizations. Published guidelines, study guides, review questions and model "Board patient treatment presentations" are available. We all know that there is a plethora of material that emphasizes "taking the Boards." The advanced education programs in prosthodontics want their products taking the Boards and being successful doing it. Truly, the specialty wants trained people to be successful in the preparation and examination process.

### *The Value of "Having the Boards"*

Now let's look at the supportive writings, the list of past lectures, the journal articles and editorials and the printed guides that are all directed to the value of being Boarded. Let's look at statements that are directed to the importance of being successful at the Boards? What follows is a detailed list of the available materials that respond to that question:

You're right! You guessed it! There is no list. There are no articles. There are no verifications. There is nothing that says having the Boards, i.e. being a Diplomate is important! Sad isn't it?? Does that take away from the value of having the Boards. Absolutely not! What follows are statements all Diplomates could make -- citing why Board status is important to the individual; why it strengthens the specialty; and finally, why the end-results become important benefits to the public at large, our patients. □

### *Diplomate Guest Contributors Making Their Own Statements of Value*

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management and multidisciplinary coordination. I don't think that one realizes the heights we reach in preparation for the ABP Examination. In some respects, the process is more rewarding than the actual certificate. In my preparation, which I completed under the current format in 1993, I was able to "thoroughly" review my patient treatments and defense. I can honestly say, this journey has made me a better clinician, as I look at treatment planning with greater confidence - but still with humility - because of the knowledge and mind set that I have attained in my Board preparation. Becoming Board Certified has also presented me with many opportunities in organized dentistry and academics that I am certain would not have been available to me otherwise. One of my mentors, Harold Litvak, once said to me when I was questioning whether or not to challenge the Board, "give me a reason not to?" I would ask the same question of every trained prosthodontist.

Trained individuals becoming Board Certified strengthens the specialty of prosthodontics. Flashy marketing and patient care, which are least motivated by patient's needs, are not our strengths or purpose. Demonstrating the value of our attained training and education and being evaluated by our peers shows that we stand strong to our commitments and knowledge. Without this process, the recognition of the specialty would be diluted by grouping trained prosthodontists with dentists interested in the discipline. This does not make a prosthodontist. Board certification is the appropriate means of recognition as a "true" specialist. It is the Seal of Approval. □

*Now read on>*

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of the training. I see the American Board of Prosthodontics as a governing body of accomplished experts in the field who examine candidates based on high standards and scientifically documented treatment modalities. The examination tested my diagnostic abilities, thought processes, and clinical ability to provide scientifically based state-of-the-art treatment to my patients.

Trained individuals becoming Board Certified strengthens the specialty of prosthodontics because it insures that those who are certified are capable of delivering to our patients the highest standard of care that has been set by the American Board. Once accomplishing the feat of becoming board certified, there is an arena for interacting and sharing with others like yourself, which will positively influence the manner in which you provide care for your patients. Board certifications also strengthen the specialty because they verify that high standards of care, treatment practices, and issues directly related to prosthodontics are seen on a specialty level by the ADA and other specialties. □

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effort required to complete the process? There is not a separate fee schedule for Board Certified prosthodontists, nor does there appear to be any marketable advantage in having attained Diplomate status. Unfortunately, the quantifiable rewards don't yet exist.

In spite of this, I think the personal rewards of achieving Diplomate status are immeasurable. The feeling of personal gratification, peer recognition and overall self satisfaction are difficult to describe. The pride one experiences in becoming Board Certified is in itself sufficient incentive to justify the effort.

Although I feel that the fee-for-service private practice has great opportunities in prosthodontics, I also believe that private practice success may, one day, be linked to Board Certification. Patient referral to those individuals with credentials is not too far in the future. As patients recognize the importance of Board Certification in medical care delivery, they will also look for the same credentials in dentistry. Patients in need of prosthodontic services, e.g. implant restorations and complex prosthodontic treatments, will seek out those practitioners who are Board Certified.

Trained individuals becoming Board Certified strengthens the specialty of prosthodontics. Having recently completed five years on the Board of Directors of the American College of Prosthodontists, it became increasingly apparent to me that the health and future of the specialty of prosthodontics are linked to the percentage of Board Certified prosthodontists. This critical statistic is used by the ADA and government agencies to examine the validity of the specialty. The specialty cannot exist without a Board to warrant to both the public and outside agencies that the specialty is needed and specialists provide a level of care that cannot be provided by others.

Ideally a specialty should have a very high percentage of its specialists Board Certified. This signifies that training programs are doing their job and that the public is assured that a Board Certified specialist has the necessary skills to provide patient care. Our specialty has a very low percentage of its specialists Board Certified. The explanation of this phenomenon is complicated, but nonetheless, represents one of the great failures of our specialty. I think it is imperative that current and future leaders in our specialty look for ways to reverse this, primarily by enhancing the value of Board Certification for the private practitioner. □

*Now read on>*

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Becoming Board Certified, beyond training in prosthodontics is personally important to me. Many prosthodontic trainees have their sights set on Board certification during their training. Besides teaching prosthodontic theory and skills, my faculty mentors designed a program that would prepare me for challenging the American Board of Prosthodontics. After completing my training, taking the Boards was the furthest thing from

my mind. I must admit, that I never gave Board certification serious consideration during my training, not even for several years after. My limited experience in prosthodontics respectfully saw Board Certified individuals as an elite group of gurus that "discover and invent prosthodontic principles, and disseminate them on the podium and through the written word." I did not think this group was for "commoners" like me.

My impetus for Board certification finally came from my hospital employer, who ultimately "suggested" that all medical and dental faculty members have Board certification. For my hospital, this requirement had financial, malpractice, and marketing implications. In today's information age, I suggest those implications are equally important for the institutional and private practitioner. Patients understand the significance of specialty training and Board certification, particularly those patients who seek the services of a prosthodontist. So my employer "appealed to my pragmatic side" by making certification a requirement for employment.....which helped me overcome my lack of confidence, fear, and awe of the certification process.

Now, with more years of experience in prosthodontics, I recognize that there are skilled and inventive prosthodontists with and without Board certification, and my Diplomate status has not made me a prosthodontic guru. One can speak of various benefits, but foremost, it has given me an intense sense of accomplishment and it has removed my chagrin when patients wish to discuss my credentials.

Trained individuals becoming Board Certified strengthens the specialty of prosthodontics. Practitioners in the health care industry derive strength from certification. Our physician colleagues often have very diverse training despite the titles of their training programs. These certifications usually attest to their practice focus and skill level. When making referrals, colleagues consider a practitioner's practice focus and certifications. Consumers of health care, be it patients or insurance carriers, place value in these certifications.

In dentistry, nearly all Board certifications are associated exclusively with recognized dental specialties, and a practitioner can only attempt the certification process after completing ADA approved specialty training. From the traditional dental perspective then, specialty training, not Board certification, defines one's practice focus. Dental practitioners are usually solo practitioners, and few have institutional appointments that require Board certification. This uniqueness for dental specialists, as compared to other health care practitioners, has probably contributed to the limited number of Board Certified specialists in dentistry.

If the medical model is any indication, consumers' use of Board certification to define dental specialists is inevitable. To this time, the insurance industry, which often requires certification to define reimbursement scales, has not penetrated dentistry. Again, if the medical model is followed, can the growth of insurance payers in dentistry be far behind? If an overwhelming majority of prosthodontists are certified, individual practitioners will benefit; and the specialty will be stronger, separated from general dentists, and will be more identifiable in the eyes of the consumer. Board certification will be increasingly important. □

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NDW, January 1999