

They Got It; But They Just Don't Get It

Bulletin, bulletin, bulletin!

No responses were received relating to remarks made in the October 2003 *ProsStars Newsletter* concerning the two sizable gifts, one directed to the Jacksonville University, and one to the University of Colorado by Dr. Gasper Lazzara and his firm, the Orthodontic Education Company.

As we said in the newsletter, Colorado's dean, Dr. Howard Landesman announced a 3 million dollar donation and a 92.7 million dollar commitment to the University of Colorado Health Sciences School of Dentistry. The moneys were coming from the Orthodontic Education Company (OEC), the managing partner and co-founder of which is Dr. Gasper Lazzara. This unusually large gift would be used to establish a new advanced specialty education program in orthodontics at the Colorado dental school and to build a new dental school to be named the Lazzara Center for Oral-Facial Health.

Our October newsletter also noted that there must be quite a shortage of orthodontists in Colorado, a rural state. Colorado has to be one of the few places that registers this short supply. One thing is for sure, and that is that if the new program opens, there will be hordes of applicants ready to train there in orthodontics. When finished they will want to head for the big cities and their suburbs just like other orthodontic program graduates are doing now. As we have discovered however, certain restrictions built into Lazzara gifts may prevent them from doing so.

Having just relocated Colorado's dental school to the old Army Fitzssimons Hospital, the legislators in the state must be scratching their heads, wondering why state moneys went to this project when a new dental school would be coming on line as announced.

The 3.5 million dollars Dr. Lazzara gave to the Jacksonville University was given by grant from the Irene and Gasper Lazzara Charitable Foundation. The grant was designated for the university's School of Orthodontics. Such a gift falls into line with many others that individuals have made or are making to institutions of higher learning. There is close to 13 trillion dollars in retirement accounts in the United States today. Many people will die leaving this money unattached. But many others are establishing gifts in charitable remainder trusts, naming universities and colleges as beneficiaries of their retirement accounts, giving monies directly to endowments, and as the Larrazas did, using a charitable foundation as the vehicle for their gift. Their gift is common and as such is creditable.

Is the Orthodontic Education Company resting? No! Subsequent to the two above mentioned "gifts" the company has now offered 47 million dollars to the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. This offer is to be used to build a 20,000 square foot orthodontics school, pay its faculty, and provide scholarships to its students. The scholarships will include a paid full tuition plus \$30,000 dollars a year. Attempting to sell the "offer" to the university's president and trustees, the dental school's dean, Dr. Patrick Ferrillo, says the program will help the disadvantaged.

Here's the catch! It now becomes clear what the Orthodontic Education Company is up to with all of their gifts and offers. The scholarship recipients must sign a contract to work for the Orthodontic Education Company for seven years after graduation. We assume that such a contract comes into play at each dental school receiving OEC monies, monies intended to solve

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the problems dental schools face.

- What are the deans thinking?
- What are the orthodontists thinking and accepting?
- What are the state legislators thinking?
- Does this new paradigm of funding affect the other specialties in dentistry?
- Why is dentistry standing by, allowing a private company to "buy" training programs?
- Why does a private company gain the right to distribute orthodontists where they wish for as long as stipulated, even by contract?
- When does dentistry rise up and say "Enough! We cannot and will not be bought! We will not allow a private company to buy us and set their own ground rules, no matter how much money they bring to the table!"

Picture if you will the ADA's accreditation process at one of the schools accepting OEC's money. Should the ADA team find fault in some aspect of the orthodontic department's training, what will they do? Begin to negotiate with the company, or challenge the dean to work out the problem with the company, or initiate a suit with the company, or discredit the program until the company (not the school) addresses the discrepancies?

Why would any dental school want to put itself into the position of training a specialist, but only if the specialist contracts with a private company to work for it for seven years? One Nevada University Regent, Doug Hill, described the proposed relationship with OEC as "indentured service"! He's right!

Indentured service indeed! Never worry, the company's contract allows the student to easily gain control again simply by repaying all the tuition and scholarship money upon graduation. Let's see, tuition (however much that will be) plus \$60,000 that can be repaid at graduation. Repaid that is if a "disadvantaged" has hit the lottery somewhere. Either the students are disadvantaged or they aren't. Maybe the company can explain which it is; and how the disadvantaged will easily be able to pay back the grants at the time of graduation.

How does this affect specialty training in

prosthodontics? For one thing it clearly says if you bring money, the deans and their schools will build, train, and adhere to the giver's desires in outcomes. The antithesis of that would be if you won't or can't bring money, the school won't or can't maintain a program, no matter what the specialty. The interest is where the money is. This will be an easy sell to the private schools. It will be even easier at the state schools because it frees up state money for other uses. Finally, it is currently orthodontic money that is being brought, and that can not and will not enhance prosthodontic training in any way!

The OEC boys weren't born yesterday. They know gifts to dental schools usually are minuscule. They know if they put their money (over 146 million dollars) to schools just established there will be an eager grab for it. In Colorado's case their dental school has always played second fiddle to the medical school in vying for state monies. If Colorado is that hard up for money and wants to serve the Western states with contract orthodontists, so be it. Colorado and the two new schools have fallen under the control of a commercial company, driven by profit, with their own objectives in mind. Proprietary, trade-school, "molar-mechanic" training? You bet!

Is there a danger or a crisis for prosthodontics built into the OEC "new funding paradigm"? Not really! Prosthodontics will continue to have its problem in gaining applicants and keeping residents-in-training numbers up. Prosthodontics as a specialty is seen as hard work, terribly demanding, always critical as to the treatment outcome, and labor intensive in its treatment planning and finalization of treatment. Throw all of the money you want at it and prosthodontics will still be very hard work. Only those understanding this will apply. Only those willing to endure a tough three years of training and a slow start in practice will seek out our specialty. At present prosthodontics and its specialty are strong and they will remain so; mainly because only the strong will pursue it and enjoy the hard work it gives them.

We will survive! ☐

I WILL WRITE NO MORE FOREVER

Adapted from the surrender statement of Chief Joseph

The time has come to say “farewell”! This issue of *the ProsStars Newsletter* will be the last.

Primarily, health problems have not allowed the concentrated thoughts or the large blocks of time that are necessary to address the important current issues in prosthodontics. Too, we may just be getting too far away from those same issues, issues that have been “the heart and soul” of the newsletter for the past nine years. Finally, we have made every effort not to be repetitive, but that too probably constitutes a danger the longer we continue publication.

An interesting review of some of the newsletter’s original objectives shows we:

- Maintained contact with approximately 80 residents trained over 20 years.

The original mailing was directed to these individuals without subscription fee. When the newsletter went to a subscription base (1998) we lost some original recipients, but added many others, as was to be expected.

- Made every effort to put current issues of the specialty into the open for thought and discussion by the specialty; and for exposure to others in the profession.

Responses from all readers indicate success.

- Challenged those trained, but not boarded to prepare for and take the American Board of Prosthodontics examinations.

Following a generalized trend in all trained prosthodontists, we were deficient in meeting this objective. We helped, but didn’t make as much progress as expected.

- Built a subscription base filled with interested leaders in the specialty.

This objective was overwhelmingly met. The response to the issues has been very positive. Negative feedback has been almost nonexistent.

- And, we met our overriding objective of being “not for profit”.

A \$5,000 newsletter donation to the American College of Prosthodontists’ Education Foundation New Vision Campaign helped meet this objective. The newsletter has been in deficit comparing expenses to income since that time. Refunding unmet subscription fees means the newsletter’s total operation will conclude in debt.

We continue to think that it is vitally important to have a separate forum for discussion of the issues; a forum which has not been presented in the scientific journals. Likewise, the annual sessions of any and all of the prosthodontic organizations have not provided satisfactory venues for issue directed discussions. Yes, we know there are active committees in every one of them, but having witnessed first hand the venting and position taking in committee work, their results don’t seem to leak out to the “in-the-pits” prosthodontist as they should. Those outside practitioners too would like to see a share of what it is that happens in the committees and what it is that is bothering our specialty.

It seems that the “op-ed” format, which voices individual opinions in a non-argumenative manner works best. Such essays provide food for thought and give opportunity to form stances used in determining the outcomes of the issues. We strongly believe there is a need for a newsletter like *ProsStars*, if for no other reason than to provide a historical account of what the issues were and to record where our specialty stood on them.

We have published nine volumes and 36 issues throughout the past nine years. An edited nine volume set (see Table of Contents, included) is available for purchase at \$24.00, Priority Mail included. The set is valuable. A reprinting and publication of all volumes of the newsletter in book form would finalize the newsletter in the best possible way. We wish this worthwhile project could be taken up and accomplished by one of our prosthodontic organizations, the ACP Education Foundation, or a benefactor wanting to preserve this part of the specialty’s history.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to all who have supported me in this endeavor and encouraged me with your subscriptions! I have found great pleasure in searching for specialty issues and writing about them, but above all in the process, I know I have better defined our specialty of prosthodontics. More than anything the chance to remain ingrained in our beloved specialty makes me realize there is nothing more satisfying than working in it; relating with prosthodontists everywhere; seeing specialty’s leadership developing and prospering; and finally, helping it in all ways possible to benefit the public at large. The *ProsStars Newsletter* has indeed been a labor of love, and I pray the specialty is better because of it.



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