



# Spirit of Our Profession

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**A**s guest editor for this issue of the *Journal*, I take great pleasure in informing our readers of the advances that have occurred in the discipline of periodontics. Like many previous issues, the final result is an eloquent description of new and evermore glitzy techniques that make our specialty the best at what it does. Indeed, there have been several new advances which Dr. Gordon L. Douglass, our recent past American Academy of Periodontology president, will introduce and put into perspective in the first article. However, these technological advances do not and cannot replace the spirit of our periodontal profession which allows us to better serve our patients, work with our colleagues, and advance our branch of learning, science and technique.

I was recently reminded of this spirit by the passing of one of my mentors, Dr. Ivan D. Ancell of Hayward, Calif. At his memorial service, I remember walking more than two blocks on a cold afternoon because the church was overflowing with people who came to remember and pay their respects to his memory. And it was at that service that I gained renewed appreciation as to why our periodontal specialty is different.

Ivan grew up as an Iowa farm boy, went to dental school at the University of Iowa, served his public health service tour in the impoverished neighborhoods of Philadelphia, and finally attended the University of Pennsylvania for his periodontal training. During this time, he learned to be passionate about his profession. Ivan and his wife, Mary, traveled to the Bay Area and he subsequently established a practice in the blue-collar town of Hayward. I often asked him why he set up in that area, and he would simply answer that these were the type of patients he felt he was akin to. At his memorial service,

many of his patients from his 34 years of practice came up and spoke of his friendship, good humor, generosity, and caring nature. When one considers that probably more than half of the church was filled with his patients, who took time out to pay their respects, it dawned on me we are the only specialty privileged enough to develop a long-term care relationship with our patients.

Along with the general dentists, we work to not only maintain their health, but we get to know these patients. Ivan was a master at this, for he always had time to listen to everyone's life experiences — good and bad. There was always time for a joke or a story to cheer people up. Often times, he was a better diagnostician because he appreciated patients as people and listened to what they told him. Ivan was able to educate people on the role of stress and diabetes on their dental health. Most importantly, these people saw Ivan not as a caregiver but as a caring "friend."

At this service, many of Ivan's professional colleagues came and spoke fondly of his contributions. Many of his referring general dentists spoke not only of his humor, but also of his mannerism of asking, "What do you think about



*Dr. Ivan D. Ancell*



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all this?" In his own style, he not only worked with his doctors, but also uplifted their appreciation of their patients' dental health problems. Fellow periodontists and specialists in the region spoke of his constant willingness to help and to cover for emergency care. This spirit of good humor, cooperativeness, and seeking a higher level of "team dentistry" is a hallmark of our profession. This spirit is the basis of multidisciplinary care.

Also at the service were Ivan's students and fellow instructors. Along with practicing 5½ days a week in a clinical setting, Ivan spent every Monday afternoon as a volunteer faculty member at University of California, San Francisco. I was but one of his many students. Most will remember him not merely as a teacher, but as someone who constantly asked you how you can be better, not only as a caregiver, and as a surgeon, but as a person. When things were going wrong, he would give you just the right balance of sympathy and then nudge you to move ahead and take on new challenges. Ivan read prolifically and was often quite modest about his knowledge.

He would never tell you that you were wrong, but ask you Socratic questions about how it could have been better or how it could have been different. Our profession continues to produce good clinicians, thanks to dedicated teachers like Ivan.

As I reflect on how the periodontal profession is taking on more "incident-based" treatment, i.e. implant placement, gingival grafting, and crown lengthening, I am gravely concerned we are losing the spirit that mentors like Dr. Ivan Ancell taught us. Perhaps this is a lesson not only for the periodontal profession, but also for dentistry as a whole. We should not be lost in the glitz of new techniques, but remember what makes dentistry unique as a profession, is that we have the potential to develop a patient relationship that has no rivals in health care. We can enjoy our comradeship with our colleagues, and contribute to our own professional future while instilling enthusiasm and passion to our "dental neophytes."

Thank you Ivan, for this is another lesson you taught me. CDA