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Keeping the Journal in Focus

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By Christopher J. Smiley, DDS
Editor-in-Chief

Keeping the *Journal* in Focus

What attracts young dentists and dental students to membership in our association? The MDA recently commissioned a study with focus group interviews to get the answers

The findings were a bit of a surprise. Tangible benefits, the things we work hard to provide, like insurance products, discounts on practice supplies, and legislative advocacy, were not among their drivers for considering membership in the MDA. The reasons they gave for joining or renewing were predominantly social and emotional. The study showed that they value how being an MDA member helps them, as dentists, fit into our greater community. They recognize the opportunity membership provides for cultivating a network for future career goals, and they seek support through the MDA to build confidence in their skills. Essentially, they want a connection to something bigger.

This got me thinking about why, decades ago, I became involved with organized dentistry. I soon realized my “drivers” were no different from our colleagues in today’s focus groups. After graduating from Marquette University School of Dentistry, my wife and I came to West Michigan to join my father’s practice. Growing up in a dental family, I knew many of his colleagues, yet we still felt like outsiders. At the time, numerous new dentists were coming to Grand Rapids, and most had graduated from the University of Detroit or the University of Michigan. They already had established relationships with each other, and we wanted to fit in.

Volunteering with our local dental society successfully cultivated the networks we sought. Serving on committees established relationships with new and seasoned practitioners. It fostered mentorships that became a resource to help address the gaps and build confidence in our skills, creating many deep and lasting friendships.

I believe that many of the drivers listed by the focus group are familiar to dentists at all stages of their careers, which is why they are an essential component

of what we hope to deliver to you through the MDA *Journal*. We are building a community where our family of readers also becomes part of something larger.

The *Journal* introduces you to our friends, the expert authors, willing to share current, original content that translates evolving research into concepts applicable to clinical care, filling gaps in knowledge and building skills and confidence for our readers.

Our focus on evidence-based dentistry helps readers have the confidence to tell a patient, “I don’t have an answer, but I know where to look to find you the best evidence to guide your care decisions.” Our “10-Minute EBD” department demonstrates this approach using clinical questions provided by readers to identify literature-supported solutions to apply directly in patient care and to share with patients to answer their questions.

The *Journal* can’t address all the identified drivers for why a colleague joins or remains an MDA member, but it has a significant impact. Focus group participants expressed that they love the printed *Journal* that arrives monthly via “snail mail.” Unlike e-publications that get overlooked or filtered out from their inbox, they said that getting an actual journal in the mail is rare and that they appreciate its relevance to everyday practice, with a physical heft they can hold in their hands. The *Journal* gets noticed; some added they love reading it with a highlighter to capture essential information supporting their goals.

No one is suggesting that we walk away from the tangible benefits we enjoy as members of the MDA. However, the findings from this study complement our aspirations for this publication. I hope that you find the MDA *Journal* connects you with the greater dental community and that our pages are welcoming, honest, and respectful in presenting content that helps you succeed and best serve your patients.

As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome. ●

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