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

Be Bullish about Dentistry — Stop Doom Scrolling!

November is traditionally a time to take stock of the past year and give thanks, yet I've been distractedly doom scrolling. It's easy to lose perspective, with

my eyes glued to apps on my phone trolling the news cycle, and that's why it's important to pause in the true spirit of Thanksgiving and see cause for optimism.

For our profession, there's plenty of reason to be bullish. You don't need to look far. Emerging technology, increasing public awareness of dentistry's impact on overall health, and the enthusiasm and drive of new colleagues joining our community create a bright future for oral health care.

Incorporating digital scanning technology invigorated my practice, generating enthusiasm for me, my team, and my patients. Seeing crown preparations magnified on a monitor is humbling, and it improves the quality of care provided by affording the opportunity to make immediate corrections. With many emerging technologies for improving practice workflow and efficiency, it is difficult to know where to begin. As Bill Gates warns, "We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next 10. Don't let yourself be lulled into inaction."

Dentistry has long promoted the many correlations between oral health and overall health, thus growing public awareness and demand for our services to support wellness. We now see the inclusion of wellness benefits in dental plan designs and the addition of dental coverage with health plans, and potentially Medicare. The influx of patients motivated by wellness and more receptive to care recommendations is an opportunity. Still, I caution colleagues that we do not yet fully understand the relationships between oral and systemic health. Evidence is evolving, and that too is cause for optimism, but we should not oversell the concept without a firm foundational understanding.

Perhaps the most hopeful sign comes from recognizing who will be shaping the future of our profession.

Applicants for dental school rank among the most qualified ever. They are willing to assume educational debt, not because they are blind to the risk, but because they see the opportunities. Connecting with recent graduates and new colleagues is energizing. They know we are in a dynamic time of change in the profession and are curious to learn how best to embrace that change. They are investing in continuing education to implement new technology and care modalities. I find them compassionate and driven to address care for the underserved. Each of us can benefit from modeling their perspectives, and we must welcome them, joining together in shaping the profession.

There are plenty of reasons to be bullish about dentistry. Take stock of the opportunities and act on them.

I temper my optimism with an awareness of the struggles of others in our community. I am thankful for COVID-19 heroes, those businesses that repurposed their operations to manufacture PPE products unavailable through the traditional supply chain at the height of the pandemic. Like those businesses who helped us, we must find ways to lend support to those continuing to struggle.

Once I shifted my attention away from the apps on my phone, I noticed many reasons to be optimistic, and I became bullish about our profession. In the spirit of Thanksgiving, take a break from doom scrolling, take stock of the opportunities, and act on them.

Happy Thanksgiving from the *Journal* team! ●