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Editor

T. F. McBride
College of Dentistry
Ohio State University
305 W. 12th Ave.
Columbus 10, Ohio

Business Manager

O. W. Brandhorst
4236 Lindell Blvd.
St. Louis 8, Missouri

Contributing Editors

F. D. Ostrander, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Isaac Sissman, Pittsburgh, Pa.

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Six Honest Serving Men

H. COLIN DAVIS, L.D.S., R.C.S. (Eng.)

It is inevitable that I should take for the subject of my Presidential Address some aspect of Dental Health Education, for this is the only subject on which I can claim any specialist knowledge, and my justification—which I make without apology—is a very simple one, and is found in the introduction to the recent masterly World Health Organization Report on Periodontal Disease—by an expert Committee on which two members of your Council sat—and which reads as follows:

The generally accepted principle that prevention is better than cure applies to periodontal disease as much as to any other; this must be fully recognized by Governments and the general public because they will be required to meet the costs of preventive measures. It will therefore be necessary to educate the public as to the benefits of these measures by intensive dental health education.

Unless, then, the great mass of the public is made constantly aware of the need for it to practice its own active measures to prevent both caries and periodontal disease, there is little hope of our rising above our present very mediocre level of dental fitness. I think there is a danger, too, that we, as a Society, in our intense preoccupation with the problems of periodontal disease, may have lost sight of the fact that the majority of dental surgeons are failing to cope with this latter problem, and the vast majority of the population is not even aware that it exists.

In support of these sombre observations I would like to remind you of earlier papers given before the Society. Sam Cripps opened his Presidential Address in 1958 with this shattering broadside:

The aim of this paper is to discuss the several reasons for the profession's world-wide failure to master that enigma known as periodontal disease. With the exception of a very small minority the profession is completely at sea. This is not provocation, but a studied statement of fact.

Presidential Address, 13th Session of the British Society of Periodontology held in the Eastman Dental Hospital, London, October 9, 1961.

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