

What's a Dentist to Do?

Jack L. Churchill, D.D.S.*

I have worked in downtown Minneapolis since 1984, which was when I bought a practice from Dr. H. He had approximately 1,000 active patients. He would always work late taking care of those few who couldn't leave work to go to the dentist. After hours he would stop at the lab and chat about anything and everything. He could talk about any subject. He just simply loved people.

Upon examining his patients after he retired, I came to know his work as immaculate: gold inlays with margins you could see but couldn't possibly feel, amalgams with intricate secondary anatomy, composites that matched so well they were virtually invisible. Besides that, his patients loved him and always asked about him.

Shortly after Dr. H retired, his wife became ill and was institutionalized. He was never able to enjoy his retirement doing things that retired people do because he was too busy diligently visiting his beloved wife at the nursing home. His wife died, and I haven't seen him since.

I think it is important to "put a face" on one of the many hundreds of heroes we have in our proud profession — one who never made a "Top 200 Dentists" list of any kind. Dr. H is sitting at home now, I'm sure staying connected with what is

happening in our profession. He probably read the "Top 200 Dentists" issue of *Mpls/St. Paul* magazine two years ago wondering what all the fuss is about. He is watching us still, and wondering what will happen next.

What will happen next?

The next "Top 200 Dentists" feature tentatively is scheduled for January of 2005. Surveys will be at your offices soon. How will you respond? Here is a Q & A to help you make a decision.

Is participating in a "Top 200 Dentists" survey unethical?

Q: Is participating in a "Top 200 Dentists" survey unethical?

A: No, technically it is not unethical, but the participation in such a survey to produce a "Top 200 Dentists" list has the potential for raising ethical questions. Such a survey lacks credibility since it is not

scientifically based and is primarily a "popularity contest" that identifies who is well known in the dental community.

Q: Is it unethical to allow yourself to be placed on a "Top 200 Dentists" list?

A: No, technically it is not. The creation of such a list is not unethical, but how the listing is communicated could possibly lead to misrepresentation and a misinterpretation of "superiority" of those listed.

Q: Is it unethical to advertise the fact you made the "Top 200 Dentists" list?

A: No, technically it is not. However, each advertisement will be judged individually on a case-by-case basis to determine if it is misleading to the public by possibly claiming superiority of one over another without substantiation.

Q: What's all the fuss anyway? Don't we have more important things to think about?

A: Certainly our plates are full. However, this issue involves two principles which guide us every day — integrity and fairness. What could be more important?

If you choose to participate and you fill out the survey, please do so with your eyes open, carefully considering how it affects our profession. Remember, Dr. H is watching us.

Please e-mail us at kdegrote@mndental.org or fax us at (651) 646-8246. We look forward to hearing from you not only regarding this issue, but also if you have any ethical dilemmas you would like to present to the membership. Perhaps we can help you decide what to do. ■

*Dr. Churchill is Chair of the Minnesota Dental Association's Committee on Constitution, Bylaws and Ethics. He is a general dentist in private practice in Minneapolis, Minnesota.