Editor’s Note

“Perspectives” on Dental Education

In ancient times, people thought the earth was flat because they saw the horizon as a flat line in the distance. It wasn’t until the fifth and sixth centuries that Greek philosophers developed evidence to support the idea of a spherical earth. Perspectives on the subject changed over time as thinkers questioned received opinions and changed both scientific and popular beliefs based on new information.

For over a decade, the Journal of Dental Education has published a category of articles called “Perspectives.” When former editor Dr. Olav Alva-res launched the section in 2005, he defined these articles’ purpose as giving readers “the benefit of important individual perspectives on matters likely to have a significant impact on dental education and practice” and noted that they “are meant to be thought-provoking, perhaps even provocative, in an effort to stimulate ongoing debate and sharing of ideas.”

As we continue to publish articles in this section, we have added procedures and guidelines that help us present the most compelling Perspectives articles to our readers. Authors who wish to submit a manuscript in this section, for example, must send me an initial query describing their proposed article, so I can perform a preliminary review prior to the actual submission. This evaluation is based on a combination of topic and approach. I receive many inquiries from authors who would like to publish their opinions on topics about which they are passionate, but not all topics and all approaches to those topics will satisfy our guidelines.

As potential authors consider a Perspectives submission, they should keep in mind two of the definitions of “perspective” in the online Merriam-Webster dictionary: “1) The appearance to the eye of objects in respect to their relative distance and positions; 2) the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance.” These concepts of “relative positions” and “relative importance” are essential because authors of Perspectives manuscripts should not merely present their opinion on a subject, but must demonstrate how it relates to an important issue in dental education and how their position relates to prevailing opinions or previous scholarship on the topic. Authors should think of their topic in relation to the whole and consider past, present, and future aspects of their argument, making sure to be current with recent relevant publications on the subject. They may also think about the argument applied to research, education, and/or clinical training in our dental education programs. Overall, authors should view their perspective in its “true relations or relative importance.”

These manuscripts thus need to balance a clearly written, well-organized, opinion-based approach with the more rigorous requirements of a traditional research-based article. That means providing support for both their own opinion and their explanations of the context and the opinions and/or research they are challenging. An argument should be the organizing principle of a Perspectives article, and it will most likely have stemmed from the authors’ own experience, a practice or innovation at their school, or their disagreement with an existing opinion or prevailing practice. Describing their experience should be part of the manuscript. However, being an opinion-oriented submission does not mean the manuscript can consist entirely of anecdotes or unsupported claims; rather, the authors’ opinions, the context, and the position they are challenging must all be supported with evidence, identified in their list of references. Like all articles published in the JDE, a Perspectives article must make a contribution to the literature by moving the conversation forward, and it must demonstrate how it is informed by previous research and thinking on its subject.

This month’s JDE provides two examples of Perspectives articles that satisfy these principles, though in different ways. In “Preparing Dental Students and Residents to Overcome Internal and External Barriers to Evidence-Based Practice,” Coleman et al. use research from the disciplines of medicine, psychology, and behavioral economics to explore how difficult it is to use evidence-based dentistry (EBD) principles. Although agreeing that EBD is a worthy goal, they explain how internal biases (hindsight, optimism, survivor, and blind-spot biases), as well as external biases (publication and corporate biases and lack of transparency), impact implemen-
tation of EBD. The article is well referenced and has the potential to shift the way we think about and teach about the use of EBD. In addition, Robinson et al.’s “Improving a Dental School’s Clinic Operations Using Lean Process Improvement” provides a well-supported argument for using the business practice of “lean production” to improve dental schools’ clinical operations, based on the authors’ experience in implementing the process. Authors contemplating submission of a Perspectives article would do well to look to these articles as successful models.

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REFERENCES