EDITORIAL

A century of progress

The Journal of the American Dental Association celebrates its centennial

The Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA), originally published as the Official Bulletin of the National Dental Association, is celebrating its 100-year anniversary in 2013. Eighteen thousand copies of the first issue were published in November 1913. JADA currently publishes and distributes more than 150,000 English-language print copies per month to members of the American Dental Association and others throughout the world. Very significantly, JADA is accessed by online users more than a million times annually and it publishes overseas editions in China, India, Mexico, the Middle East, Portugal, Spain and Russia.

Take a moment to think about the changes in the United States and in the world that have occurred since JADA was first published in 1913. Infants born in the United States when JADA was first published could expect to live to about 50 to 55 years of age; infants born today can expect to live to about 75 to 80 years of age. There have been two world wars, and the population of the United States has increased from about 97 million in 1913 to more than 313 million today. Heart disease was the most common cause of death in 1913 (11 percent of all deaths), and it remains so today (24 percent of all deaths), but in 1913 tuberculosis, which is rare today, caused almost as many deaths (10 percent) as did heart disease.

Consider the contrasts between the typical one-man dental practice of 1913 and the typical dental practice of today that often is composed of male and female dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, receptionists, office managers and others such as technology and electronic information specialists.

Perhaps more than any other dental publication, JADA provides a living history that documents the evolution of dentistry from the early 20th century to the present.
century, as disease prevention received more emphasis and new methods of treating diseases were developed, many articles were published in JADA that focused on new methods for preventing and treating oral diseases. Through the vision and leadership of its editors (Box), JADA has had a critical role in exchanging and disseminating information among dental professionals and has been an important source of peer-reviewed scientific information for all health practitioners. As such, JADA has had a key role in guiding and shaping the direction of our profession and in the prevention and treatment of oral disease.

As noted in 1963 by Dr. Lon Morrey in his chronicle of JADA's first 50 years, “few dentists today ... can visualize the manner in which dentistry was practiced at the turn of the century. There were no local anesthetics as they are known today, no acrylic resins, no processing of delicate and intricate castings, no antibiotics, and no x-ray equipment.” As we reflect on 100 years of progress in dentistry and the central role that JADA has had in communication among dentists and the dissemination of new information to our profession, we can add an amazing array of new developments to Dr. Morrey's list that have had an impact on health and the practice of dentistry.

Every dental professional could develop his or her own list of developments that have reshaped American dentistry in the last 100 years, but a few that come to mind include the changes in dental education that emphasize a university-based education, an increased emphasis on disease prevention in dental practice, the transforming impact of fluoridation in preventing dental caries, the evolution of group dental practice and third-party payment for dental services, the emphasis on infection control in dental practice, development of new restorative materials and techniques that conserve tooth structure, the widespread use of dental implants in prosthetic dentistry, the advent of computer-aided design/computer-aided manufacturing in dental practice, digital electronic information systems and an increased emphasis on evidence-based dental practice.

To celebrate JADA's 100th birthday, 11 “landmark” articles published in The Journal in its first 100 years have been selected for highlighting in its centennial year. Each issue of JADA in its centennial year, from February through December, will feature an online link to an original article that was published in JADA and a commentary about the article written by someone who either has first-hand knowledge about the article or its topic or by a person who has a particular interest in the topic of the selected landmark article. The landmark articles were selected by using one or more of the following criteria:

- the article summarized (at the time of publication) the state of knowledge of a topic of major interest in dentistry;
- the article presented or summarized research, knowledge or both that led to increased understanding of oral disease or its prevention and treatment;
- the article presented or summarized research or knowledge that changed dental or public health practice.

The authors of the commentaries about the selected landmark articles highlighted in the

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Editors of The Journal of the American Dental Association, 1913-present.*

Otto U. King, 1913-1925
Charles N. Johnson, 1925-1938
L. Pierce Anthony, 1938-1944
Harold Hillenbrand, 1944-1947
Lon W. Morrey, 1947-1963
Leland C. Hendershot, 1963-1973
Herbert C. Butts, 1974-1977
Roger H. Scholle, 1978-1986
William Wathen, 1987-1990
Lawrence H. Meskin, 1990-2001
Marjorie K. Jeffcoat, 2001-2004
Michael Glick, 2005-present

* Compiled by the Archivist, American Dental Association, August 2008.
upcoming 2013 issues of JADA will briefly discuss the effect of the article or its main topic in terms of its impact on dentistry, dental practice or health. We especially wish to express our gratitude to the authors of the commentaries, who so generously agreed to share their thoughts about the 11 selected landmark articles that have appeared in JADA since 1913.

We recognize that many landmark articles that have been published by JADA in the past 100 years have had a transformative effect on dentistry. Indeed, whether a particular article is considered to be a “landmark” article depends on one’s perspective. For example, a dentist who practices mainly restorative dentistry might give primary consideration to articles that focused on advances in restorative methods and dental restorative materials; a public health dentist probably would focus on JADA articles that dealt with prevention in populations at risk of developing disease; and a dental specialist probably would focus on articles that dealt with his or her specialty. Because the readership of JADA involves all facets of dentistry, selection of just 11 so-called landmark articles for highlighting in its centennial year has been a challenging, yet fascinating process. It involved hand and electronic searches of the JADA archives, consultation with general dental practitioners, specialty practitioners, dental educators, the JADA Editorial Board and JADA staff members. Many suggestions were made and all were given serious consideration. Clearly, many other articles could have been selected to be highlighted as part of JADA’s centennial year. Our selection of 11 articles is just that … a “selection” of landmark articles from JADA’s first 100 years. It is hoped that these articles and the accompanying commentaries will give readers a brief snapshot of a few developments that have changed dentistry and that they will cause readers to reflect on the advances in dentistry during the past 100 years, as well as on the role that JADA has had in shaping and bringing these developments to our profession and the patients we serve.

Finally, we also hope that readers will take a few moments to think about the next century of JADA—and how dentistry will be viewed when the 200th anniversary of JADA is celebrated in 2113.

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