

Jeffrey M. Cole, D.D.S., M.B.A.
President

April 22, 2019

Dear Editor:

The American Dental Association (ADA) and dentists across the country are dedicated to the health and safety of the patients they serve. Your recent article that appeared in the May 2019 issue, "The Truth About Dentistry," is actually far from it. As a dentist for 32 years, I was utterly disappointed in the author's reinforcement of inaccurate, negative stereotypes about dentists, and the use of one example of alleged professional misconduct to make blanket statements about the entire dental profession.

The ADA is dedicated to evidence-based dentistry, which integrates the dentist's clinical expertise, the patient's needs and preferences, and the most current, clinically relevant evidence. All three are part of the decision-making process for patient care. To that end, the ADA successfully advocated for evidence-based dentistry to become a required component of the dental school curriculum and established the Center for Evidence-Based Dentistry (Center for EBD) to develop resources that help dentists integrate relevant scientific evidence into patient care. We have the data to show that dentists all across the country are accessing this content.

The most recent set of clinical practice guidelines from the ADA Center for EBD provides dentists with clear guidance on the benefit of less invasive approaches to managing cavities among patients. While prevention of cavities has long been a part of the ADA's efforts to improve public health, the new guidelines provide dentists with the insight to discuss with patients various treatment options and information about the effectiveness of those options, including how long they will last and how much they will cost.

The author's implication that dentists are motivated by profit to pay down high educational debt is not borne out by the facts. For instance, dentists have advocated for fluoridation of community water supplies to prevent tooth decay for decades. Why does the profession advocate for something that would actually result in less need for treatment? Because dentists are doctors of oral health and tooth decay is a disease that we want to prevent for the good of the public.

Dentists hold a special position of trust and as such are obligated to adhere to the highest ethical standards with the primary goal being the benefit of patients and the public. A dentist's ethical obligation is to meet the needs, desires and values of the patient within the bounds of accepted treatment, as described in the [ADA Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct](#).

The ethical responsibility of dentists and the rights of dental patients are paramount to experiencing and receiving optimal dental care and dentists across the country encourage their patients to take an active role in their dental health. That includes being selective in finding a dentist with whom they can openly communicate in order to receive personalized care and asking questions they may have about a diagnosis or procedure before any treatment is performed. We want our patients to know that they always have the option to discuss alternative treatment plans, decline care or seek another opinion.

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The overwhelming majority of dentists are ethical practitioners, and that's why dentists are consistently ranked among the most honest and ethical professionals, according to Gallup public opinion polls. Every profession unfortunately has some individuals with questionable ethics. This is as true in journalism as it is in dentistry. It is unfair to paint an entire profession with such a broad and negative brush.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey M. Cole". The signature is stylized with loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jeffrey M. Cole, D.D.S., M.B.A.
President
American Dental Association