

# Academy Connection

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## President's Message



### GIVE BACK A SMILE: A LIFE-CHANGING GIFT

by Michael R. Sesemann, DDS, AACD President

I welcomed the new patient with reverence and respect, being careful not to say something careless. As I asked her to recount her medical and dental history, I approached the subject cautiously so as not to disregard her feelings or dredge up too many horrible memories...

"I don't need to know this information in order to treat you," I said, "but if you could give me information as to how the trauma occurred, it will help me to better understand your needs as a patient."

"Sure, no problem," she replied in a nonchalant manner. "I don't remember much about it, I passed out until the police arrived."

But she did recall the early moments. She continued on, informing my assistant and me of the terrifying events that occurred that day before she lost consciousness. An argument between her and her mate quickly escalated from questions based on erroneous suspicions to an act of extreme physical violence. The next thing she realized, the phone was being torn out of the wall and the cord was being used to bind her hands and feet.

At that point of the attack, her fear was amplified as her "loved one" searched through the drawers. Finding a pair of pliers, he returned to his captive and began the unthinkable. Using the everyday tool as a weapon of torment, he began to employ the pliers as forceps, forcing open our patient's mouth and gripping her teeth with the intent of extracting them.

It was not long thereafter that a loss of consciousness mercifully occurred. The next memory she had was of policemen trying to gently awaken her. Sitting up she realized she was covered in red, and that the dryness in her mouth was due to the thickened and clotting of blood brought about from her attacker's horrendous actions. The unsophisticated technique had left as many teeth shattered as were cleanly delivered.

"So," she continued, "since he was caught in the midst of the attack, he was sent to prison, leaving me the time and peace to see if I could get my life back together. That's why I'm here, Doc."

My assistant and I sat silently with concern etched on our faces. Dental school had not prepared me for this kind of history taking. And, though the Board of Trustees gives tons of support to providers, the materials from the GBAS program had not prepared me for this. I was expecting a person that was not so forthcoming and perhaps introverted because of a reluctance to trust anyone. Characteristics we would all certainly understand given the circumstances.

The experience illustrated to me that survivors of domestic violence come in all shapes, sizes, temperaments and personalities. However there is one common thing they all share — they deserve to have a positive experience occur in their lives. And we, as members of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, have the skills to make that happen. We can help them regain their confidence and self-esteem so they can try to rebuild their lives with strong job interviews and confident social interaction.

Our Board of Trustees has been working very hard to give people like my patient that chance. There has been an unprecedented effort on their part to partner all of the survivors in the GBAS system with an AACD provider. So that the commitment is a two-way street, there has also been an attempt to clear up participation standards so providers and their staffs are protected from broken appointments and unappreciative patients. The survivor is asked to make a commitment. The point is there has never been a better time to be part of the GBAS program and help someone — a person who deserves something good to happen.

As we experience the generosity of the holiday season, please take a moment to contact the GBAS team at the AACD Executive Office and see if there is a survivor in your area. Have a talk with your staff about joining together to give a gift that only your talents and expertise can give. Then...

Give Back a Smile.

My best to you and yours,

Michael