

FORUM FIVE



and irresponsible editorials in last week's *Gateway* (Tuesday, March 12th) that I have yet to see. In it he paints a picture of the avarice dental profession, making it on easy street, working convenient office hours and refusing emergency cases because they are booked "four weeks to three months in advance."

There is a dentist-population ratio in Canada that is appalling; a dentist working as hard as he can from 8:00 until 5:00 every working day of the year can only see a minority of these patients on a regular basis. That leaves 50-60% of the people who are not receiving any form of dental care. Why the shortage of dentists Mr. Billingsly? Well, before you become too comfortable with the notion that the number of graduating dentists is in some way ruled by the profession, get a load of this: it costs the individual \$15,000 to go through dental school after two or three years of science at two thou' a shot (that includes eating and other living expenses). Add to this the expenses the taxpayer must divy up to support a dental school and the ivory tower from which you so boldly speak, and you begin to get some inkling of the reason the faculty has been denied facilities for expansion for the past fifteen years.

How about a little realistic information while we're at it concerning Government financed dental care? If you think you are agitating for the masses via socialized dentistry, you have missed the boat. Far from quaking in our boots over the mere thought of it, the Profession as a whole in Canada are actively campaigning for the adoption of a prepaid government Denticare scheme which far and away refutes the malicious intent of your accusation. The Alberta Dental Association has approached the Provincial government on various levels to implement a Denticare program to supplement the present coverage that is given to geriatric patients. Yes, Alberta already has elements of socialized dental care.

Do you think you might have a problem about dentists Mr. Billingsly? Anxiety-produced stimuli are within the unconscious and the behavior elicited is related to early childhood responses to potentially threatening situations. In anxiety there is NO consciously-known antagonist. It would seem that your reaction to dentists arises from a conflict between the conscious knowledge of their role of helper and healer, and the suppressed awareness of their potential to cause pain and discomfort. The dentist assumes, to that degree, the status of father-figure, and his authority and distress potential are polarized against his concern; so that the patient, in a relatively helpless and uninformed position, regards him with child-like ambivalence and thus anxiety.

When you resort to outrageous hyperbole in comparing dentists to

undertakers ("you've got to go to them sooner or later and they know it") you begin to reveal something about yourself. According to you, dentists must "conquer the idea of spending a good part of their life with their fingers in someone else's mouth"; you speak of "fifty dollar dental bills sitting in your mouth waiting to mature"; you also mention "getting to the inner sanctum to meet with the man in white" so "you can talk money". And if you think "the very thought of possibly having a dirty sulcus is enough to induce severe paranoia", then I would suggest you examine some of your attitudes with as much dispassioned objectivity as you can muster. It perhaps might be inferred from your treasury of the memory of "one dentist that had worked in a tough town where a logger with a sore tooth would rather push your head in than go back to the woods for a month with an abscessed tooth" that you harbour deep seated psychological feelings towards dentists as a group. This might have arisen through an unpleasant experience with a dentist, or might simply reflect a quirk of your personality development.

Whatever the cause, the distorted kind of slander which you offer up to the public as gospel bears no resemblance to the realities of life re: dentistry that exist for every student on this campus or every resident of this country. The Canadian candy industry, unhappy with the per capita consumption of candy in Canada designated February as Candy Month. There was an industry-supported promotion featuring all-media advertising, dealer incentives, point-of-purchase promotions and advertising tie-ins with major retailers. Estimated cost was one million dollars. Dental Health Week, on the other hand, though much shorter in duration, had a budget of \$25,000 for Alberta in support of learning to care for your own teeth.

It is self evident that the profession encourages the practice of measures which ought normally to decrease their sources of income, yet you have the audacity to accuse dentists of unscrupulous profiteering? Shame on you Mr. Billingsly. You are behind the times. I suggest you rethink your ideas and examine how you relate to dentists and then perhaps seek some professional help.

R.D. Clarke

When I first read your editorial of March 12th, 1974, in the *Gateway* entitled "Dental Gripes", my first reaction was that it was too incredulous to warrant a response. But then I thought that many people might actually believe what you printed to be fact and not, as you must have intended, mere hyperbole for the editorial effect.

Your initial exaggeration is that it costs a great deal to go to the dentist. In fact it costs a good deal more in the long term to stay away. A group of

dentists who were concerned about this complaint did a random survey of their own patients files. They found that the average person who had sought regular dental care spent about thirty dollars (\$30.00) per year on dentistry. The key phrase here is "regular dental care". This is pretty inexpensive care, especially when you consider many people spend six times this amount on cigarettes over the same period. If you let things go, and you get hit with a two or three hundred dollar tab to get yourself back in good dental health, you can hardly blame the dentist for your negligence.

You insult my intelligence again when you claim that it is impossible to get an emergency appointment and that you tried sixteen dentists before getting one appointment. A recent study into the availability of emergency service interviewed 1300 families in Alberta. The study found that of the 500 families who had a family member experience a dental emergency, 86% were able to obtain treatment at the time of the occurrence. You also complain that you may be required to miss a few classes or take time off work in order to see a dentist. My heart really goes out to you that you should find it inconvenient to be asked to adapt to a dentist's hours rather than the dentist adapting to your lecture timetable. If you were referring to emergency treatment, and you are more concerned about missing a class than obtaining treatment, the emergency cannot be too urgent.

You complain that a dental receptionist will not give an estimate for your treatment. The dentist himself cannot give an estimate until he has seen you and has been able to develop a treatment plan, so how can you reasonably expect a girl, who often lacks any dental training, to offer such an estimate. A dentist will be more than happy to give you an estimate of treatment prescribed, as well as the cost of alternate forms of treatment. This works to the mutual benefit of both dentist and patient by removing a major source of misunderstanding.

Your final statement about dentists "shaking in their boots" over socialized dentistry goes beyond exaggeration - it is totally untrue. The Alberta Dental Association has been actively lobbying for years to have a dental care program instituted. The dentists are not afraid of socialized dentistry, but the public is afraid of dentists. Are you aware that persons on welfare have access to free dental care, yet, only 25% seek it out. There are a great many insurance programs available, many at no cost to the subscriber, yet none has more than 50% of the people with access taking advantage of such schemes.

Underlying your letter I detect an attitude, which many may share, that dentists are making a giant profit off of a monopoly position with unlimited demand. The problem is now one of distribution; while some dentists are booked two months in advance, others are moving out of the cities because they do not have a sufficient patient load to pay the bills. Admittedly, the dentist-population ratio is poor, but the reason is not a self-limiting policy imposed by the dental profession but is due to the fact that no facilities are being built to allow an increased enrolment in dentistry. This campus has seen expansion of the education building at a time when teachers are unemployed. A new lab building has been erected, a new fine arts building and a new medical building. Continual lobbying by the dental faculty has failed to obtain funds for similar expansion despite the obvious public demand. In fact, budget cuts have been so severe we do not always have sufficient materials for the students now enrolled.

You belittle Dental Health Week, the purpose of which was to allow people access to

editorial

Thank you fellow students

Well, here we have them, the results of the last election. My own opinion about running the results is that we're long on space and a story like that can make good copy. I'm really not too concerned with who is going to read the story because not too many people really care about the results.

I've met students at this university who are fully paid-up in their Students' Union dues as well as Athletic fees and who don't know who the current Students' Union president (remember George Mantor?) is or who will be president next year (you know Joe McGhie?) - What's more they don't even care. So why run the results of elections?

Well, we have to please as many people as we can, and there would be about 209 people who would like to know what happened at the election. I'm one of those people who can't afford to pay money and then not know what's going to happen to it, so I like to follow up on these affairs. I like to have a say in what happens to the dough I donate to the system; it's a nice luxury. That's not to say that I advocate other people doing the same. I also like the luxury of having a say in what happens to other people's money, too.

A frequent letter writer, John Savard, in one of his moments of illuminated ruminations quipped, "I don't care, it only makes my vote all the more powerful." I like that; he's a man after my own heart. He knows where it's at. After all, the more people who get involved in important things like elections and referendums, the more likelihood of opposition to our views, as informed and correct as they may be.

For those of us who have been reading the letters that Savard has written in the past, and with the thought in mind that he not only writes letter, but votes in elections, in my opinion, that should stimulate any self-respecting academic to travel to the polls.

My advice to the no-little-care-less robots out there who pay their annual near fifty bucks for Students' Union and Athletic fees is to simply remain in their rut of ill-information and non-commitment. This way people like Savard and I can make good use of the system with as little personal cost as possible.

There are hundreds of clubs and facilities on campus which are already paid for by the thousands of yulds who only come to this campus to sit in a classroom. I love them all; and a hearty thanks for the free ticket.

Things like election turnouts and the use of free services are in a very good state of affairs as far as I am concerned. I can perpetrate any far-out view I like with very little danger, and can make use of very many services at very little cost.

Who knows, maybe if I can persuade even more people to fall into the same abysmal rut that thousands of other enjoy every day, I might even be able to vote in a socialist student government next year, and having graduated out, leave the campus with a government that would really set the campus on its international toes.

Greg Neiman

information about preventive dentistry. You obviously did not search out any of the booths to seek an answer to your complaints. If you would take the time, maybe even miss a class, to obtain regular dental care and to become aware of the concepts of preventive dentistry and good oral hygiene, you would not only avoid the high costs of neglect but would avoid the need for emergency dental care. It's a simple concept, yet, far too many people find it easier to wait until the pain forces them to a dentist, and then complain about not being able to get treatment at their convenience. Our first obligation

has to be to the patient who has shown a desire to maintain good dental health by arranging for regular treatment.

In summary, I find it disappointing that your letter is built entirely on hypothesis and assumption born of ignorance. No profession need be afraid of criticism if it is warranted and constructive, for it is via this feedback that we can improve. What we do not need is non-contributory allegations, which border dangerously close to slander and are based only on speculation with no effort to seek out the truth.

John Thompson
Dent. IV

The Gateway

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editor-in-chief Allyn Cadogan

production Scott Partridge
managing Carl Kuhnke
news Satya Das
advertising Lorne Holladay

photography Doug Moore
arts Walter Piings
sports Paul Cadogan
features Greg Neiman

STAFF THIS ISSUE: Rick Bilak, Sandy Campbell, Kimball Day, Gary Draper, Bernie Fritze, John Kenney, Harold Kuckertz Jr., Saxby Phillips, Margriet Tilroe, Brian Tucker, Garry West, Cathy Zlatnik.