Calling For a Culture of Collegiality in our Colleges of Dentistry

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I begin my exploration of this vitally important, though complex, subject, by adapting a comment by the distinguished physician and leader in higher education, Dr. Edmund Pellegrino, from his book Humanism and the Physician: The need for a recasting of dental education is implicit in the disquietude expressed by many students, staff, faculty, and patients, who call for a more humanistic culture. A culture in which there is a spirit of sincere concern for the centrality of human values in every activity and encounter. A concern that focuses on respect for the freedom, dignity, worth, and belief systems of the individual person, and a sensitive, non-humiliating, and empathetic way of helping.

I join Dr. Pellegrino's call today. A call to eliminate from our culture in dental education the systems that are barriers to us realizing our individual potential as human beings; and the barriers that interfere with our colleges being the very best they can possibly be in their mission of patient care, education, research, and public and professional service. My call is to a culture of collegiality.

In issuing such a call, I will:

- define the concept of culture and suggest its importance in transforming our colleges of dentistry,
- describe the idea of collegiality, and
- argue for philosophies that are basic to collegiality in three dimensions of our collegiate life: leadership, education, and patient care.

CULTURE

Understanding culture is our way of understanding people. We readily acknowledge that the American culture is different than the Chinese culture, the Mexican culture, the European culture, or the Middle Eastern culture. By such an acknowledgment we are affirming that we have differing understandings of life and the world. We honor different traditions. We hold different ways of looking at our environment. different mechanisms for assigning meaning. Let me define culture:

Culture is the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups whether those groups be families, colleges, religions, races, geographic regions, or nations. Culture is that which provides a frame of reference with which to interpret the meaning of activities and events.

Recently we invited a prospective faculty member from a large metropolitan area of our country for an interview to the University of Kentucky. In a telephone conversation prior to the planned visit, the individual expressed some concern about considering Kentucky as a prospective home and asked the question "Is there any culture there?" Of course there's culture in Kentucky! You cannot not have culture! Culture is analogous to personality in that regard. Everyone has a personality; and yes, Kentucky has a culture. We have a set of relatively unique, identifying norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that
guide our behavior. Our culture in Kentucky has points of
commonality with the culture in which the person who
asked me the question lives, as well as points of
discontinuity.

Likewise, colleges of dentistry have unique cul-
tures defined by their university, by location, by size,
by history, and by tradition. Every college has estab-
lished norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, and assump-
tions that are basic to the college’s policies, procedures,
and operations.

Culture produces a framework for understanding
behavior. Behavior is shaped by our shared rela-
tionships, understandings, and beliefs. Culture serves as
a framework within which to determine rewards and
punishments, determine what is valued and what is
not, establish the moral imperatives that bond us to
individuals, and order our behavior. Culture provides
contextual clues necessary to interpret words and acts.
Culture gives actions and events meaning. Culture
enhances stability in that it permits predictability and
enhances our sense of certainty. Culture permits intro-
duction to and socialization of individuals who would
become members of a community.

It is not possible to talk about change, to issue a
call for collegiality, without going to the heart of the
issue ... our cultural values. We can discuss changing
practices and programs all we want, but ultimately the
determinative of what we do as a college is rooted in
what we believe, and what we value ... who we are.
Houston Smith, the noted philosopher of religion, has
expressed it: “What you do depends on who you are,
and who you are depends on what you see.”3 The
reason we hear so much about vision or seeing in
today’s world is because we know that what we see,
what we are able to visualize, what we dream, ulti-
mately determines our reality ... what we do.

**Collegiality**

My call is a call for us to examine our culture. The
culture I believe that must come to characterize our
nation’s colleges of dentistry is one that is best de-
scribed as collegial. The etymological roots of both
college and community converge. Both derive from the
Latin meaning, “being together.” In its original sense, a
college is a “community of scholars;” colleagues work-
ting together on a common mission. To miss the idea of
community in college is to miss the essence of college.6

In our colleges today we come together as col-
leagues to imaginatively transmit knowledge through
teaching, to creatively search for new understandings
through research, and to effectively serve the society
that has endowed us with its resources. To be optimally
effective in achieving this mission requires a unique
community, a community of learned faculty, bright and
eager students, and a dedicated support staff. Such a
community is complex, but in its complexity there can
be no loss of the concept of collegiality. We are col-
leagues, equals; not in roles, but in value and in person!
All of our policies, procedures, and practices must
support the radical notions of egalitarianism and hu-
manism. Despite our different responsibilities, our dif-
ferent ages, our different levels of maturity, and our
different experiences ... our norms, values, attitudes,
beliefs, and assumptions, that is, our culture, must be
collegial! Knowing that we are each unique, yet caring
for one another in tangible and specific ways while
respecting our individual autonomy are imperatives to
the humane.7 Knowing, caring, responding, and re-
pecting are all values we must hold for our fellow
humans in a collegial relationship. We must continually
affirm that we are partners in this enterprise of dental
education; banded together, unified, blended, bonded
as “colleagues in community” in order to fulfill our
unique human potentiality and to synergistically create
the larger human good, the good of the community, the
good of our colleges.

We must be a genuine community. The Germans
have a word for it, “gemeinschaft;” that is, shared
organizational experience based in relationships.8 It is
to be distinguished from the German word “gersch-
schaft,” that is bureaucratically structured organiza-
tional life based in rules and regulations. A culture of
collegiality is a gemeinschaft. Unfortunately most of
our colleges of dentistry are colleges in name only —
they are gerschenschafts.

Our colleges must become communities where
we value one another. Absent a sincere valuing of the
other, all programs and techniques designed to achieve
collegiality will be transparent and hollow; and ulti-
mately will not be successful. Values are sustained,
techniques fail. When we value ourselves and others we
express a positive set of assumptions about personal
significance. We affirm:

- A faith in the intention to treat each person as important, a unique, irreplaceable
  individual.
- A confidence in the ability to handle situations, or to recognize when help is
  needed.
- A trust in the willingness to follow through on promises.
- A belief and a commitment to each person’s well-being.

When we devalue or discount ourselves or others
we express an opposite set of assumptions: lack of faith,
lack of confidence, lack of trust, and lack of belief. Our
valuing attitude is foundational to all of our relation-
ships and to our success in being with colleagues in
community. Valuing self and valuing others is counting
self and counting others. Counting self and counting
others is esteeming self and esteeming others. Without
self-esteem and without esteem for others, community
cannot be built or sustained.

In such a valuing community, individuals and
groups of individuals can prosper and thrive, but aspi-
rations to power and control are checked. Communities
of colleagues cannot and must be not be dominated by
either students, or faculty, or staff, or administrators.

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Each component of a collegial community has a unique and significant contribution to make, and the spirit of collegiality makes possible the contribution of all. There are two classic images of being and working together, the herd and the hive. The herd may need a shepherd, but each animal is grazing for him or herself and can easily be separated from the herd. In the hive, by contrast, there are worker bees, drones, and a queen. There is a division of labor and a product toward which they all work in common. Separation from the hive is extinction. Of course neither image is a totally accurate metaphor for human society and community. Even in exemplary communities there is something in we humans that causes us to want out and to sense that our development is stunted by being part of the whole rather than being the whole itself. The tension between freedom and attachment, and attempts to achieve the impossible union of the two, are the permanent condition of man. My call to collegiality however, is a call to a corrective in dental education. A call to understand the college of dentistry as more hive than herd.

THE SUBSTANCE OF COLLEGIALITY

While I have argued for a culture of collegiality, and defined both the concept of culture and the idea of collegiality, thus far it is more of an orientation, an attitude, or as I have expressed it a spirit. Calling for a culture of collegiality is a call to be human, to humanity, to a humanism. What though is the substance of collegiality. What philosophical principles or tenets guide the behavior of an organization and its members in a culture that is committed to collegiality. I want to examine this question by looking at three dimensions of our collegiate life. First, a philosophy of administrative leadership consistent with a culture of collegiality or ... an examination of how college leaders relate to faculty, staff, and students. Secondly, a philosophy of education in a culture of collegiality ... or how the college faculty relates to students. And finally, a philosophy of patient care in a collegial community ... or how the faculty, staff, and students relate to patients.

Philosophy of Administrative Leadership—Our colleges are guided by the decisions of individuals we designate as administrators. These administrators set goals and allocate resources to achieve college goals. They have responsibility and authority. Administrators, like the organizations in which they labor, are pervasive in society. Successful organizational performance necessitates effective administrative leadership. Leadership must be provided for the "collegiality" for which I am calling. The administration's structure, processes, and behavior must be such as to support collegiality. No administrative behavior should damage the quality of the climate of this unique community of colleagues. Certain individuals find opportunity for leadership in the college community and the college community provides support for and correctives to that leadership. Collegial administrators seek to create and maintain an optimum "spirit of place."

Basic to a collegial leadership posture is a commitment to each colleague in the community being all that he or she can be; to each colleague in the community achieving their full potential in the context of the college good. Paul Tillich, the eminent German-American theologian, expressed this idea as the moral imperative for humanity, "to become what one potentially is ... a person in a community of persons." The psychological expression of this moral imperative has been articulated in the human relations movement by Abraham Maslow. Maslow said, "What it is we can be, we must be. This need we call self-actualization ... It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely to the tendency for one to actually become what one is potentially. The tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is ... to become everything one is capable of becoming." This interest in one's own self and its full development must be tempered by the hive attitude. We realize that our best interests can only be achieved in a community of others. Administrative leadership must evidence an understanding that each member of the community is operating from an enlightened self-interest. Administrative leadership must not lose sight of each of us as unique individuals striving for personal fulfillment; but such leadership must also acknowledge that we can attain such only by cooperating with one another for the ultimate good of the community. Collegial leadership interprets, communicates, and balances the individual good and the common good. Robert Bellah expresses it well in his recent, notable work, The Good Society, where he argues that we must work to create the good society (community), where "the common good is the pursuit of the good in common."

I must contrast two competing theories of administrative leadership, one supportive of the collegiality I am calling for and the other not. Only by doing so can I make clear the type of leadership I believe must exist in a culture of collegiality. The classical theory of administration assumes a view of man as economic ... man as concerned preponderantly with his economic well-being. Therefore, organizations bought people's time, told them specifically what to do, how to do it, and at what level to produce. The relationship between employer and employee in this classical theory is a contractual obligation that entails the right to command, through legitimate authority, such as a dean or department chair, and the duty to obey. This theory led to the establishment of formal hierarchies through which clear lines of command and obligation could be identified. The problem with this traditional theory is its simplistic understanding of human motivation. In acknowledging a so-called economic man, it ignores other more powerful motivators: esteem, belongingness, respect, meaning, and self-realization. Classic bureaucratic assumptions about our colleges are:
• Members of the college community have an inherent distaste of work and try to avoid it.
• Members of the college community lack ambition, dislike responsibility, and prefer to be closely directed.
• Members of the college community are by nature self-centered and indifferent to the college's overall goal attainment.
• Members of the college community are resistant to change.
• Members of the college community desire job security and economic rewards above all else.

In contrast, the belief systems of administrative leadership in a collegial culture are:
• Members of the college community want to help improve the college's performance.
• Members of the college community are committed to maximizing their full potential in making contributions to the college mission.
• Members of the college community seek and desire additional responsibility, commensurate with their ability and skills, for improving the college's performance.
• Members of the college community desire to exercise their individual autonomy to promote their own growth as well as the accomplishment of college goals.

These two sets of assumptions regarding human motivation obviously result in diametrically different leadership practices. The traditional leads to autocratic administration based largely in fear, compliance with directives, and adherence to the edicts of the few. A purative base serves as the principal means of motivation. The more optimistic view of human nature leads to collegial administration characterized by:
• A social system of interaction, problem solving, and mutual influence.
• Efficient and effective communication.
• College goals that reflect the needs and desires of the stakeholders in the college community.
• High levels of reciprocal influence.
• Participation in decision making.
• Highly satisfied faculty, staff, and students.

My call today is for a culture of collegiality led by administrators with this high and noble view of human-kind.

Philosophy of Education—Let me begin with a clear and direct declaration. Every educational goal we aspire to achieve is best accomplished by meeting our students on a plane of democracy and treating them as we would want to be treated; as sensitive, needy, responsible, caring human beings...as colleagues. No other value, no other attitude, no other belief, no other assumption, no other policy, makes sense. And no other policy is moral.

• Students are the most important persons in the college. Without students there would be no need for the college.
• Students are not enrollment statistics, but human beings with aspirations, feelings, and thoughts, like our own.
• Students are not people to be tolerated so that we can do our thing, they are our thing.
• Students are not dependent on us, rather we are dependent on them.
• Students are not an interruption of our work, but the purpose of it. We do not do them a favor by helping them. They do us a favor by giving us the opportunity to do so.11

At Kentucky we have had a formal and explicitly stated philosophy of education that has guided our teaching/learning encounters since our founding. While time does not permit the delineation of a comprehensive philosophy of education, I must discuss a few dimensions of such a philosophy that are basic to a culture of collegiality.

All of your educational practices and procedures are grounded in some philosophy. It may not be coherent, it may not be consistent, it may not be stated...but it exists. I believe that it is very difficult for us to have an effective educational program without a written expression of our philosophy of education; a philosophy that can be communicated, understood, challenged, critiqued, and revised. A philosophy of education is a set of first principles always calling us back from the “whats” and the “hows” of our instructional endeavors to the “whys.” The “whats” and “hows” are always changing, the “whys” do not.

Absent a clear and explicit statement of a philosophy of education that guides the teaching/learning process, developing one is a first step in creating a culture of collegiality.

I believe a philosophy of education consistent with and supportive of a culture of collegiality will contain three tenets.

First, the role of the faculty is to define, guide, encourage, support, and in general facilitate students’ learning. Teaching is the facilitation of learning. All teaching methodologies, all educational strategies, must be monitored and critiqued by this criterion, do they facilitate student learning? If not, they must be challenged and abandoned.

Second, the goal of education should be to develop in our students the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for them to become life-long learners.
and to do so in such a manner that we create a society of learners committed to reflection on the learning process, the results of the process, and a life of continuing inquiry for understanding and application. I suggest this second element of philosophy, not to discuss the far-reaching implications of lifelong learning, but rather to highlight that perhaps the most important aspect of our work is to form appropriate attitudes in our students. For far too long we have overemphasized and focused on knowledge and skills to the severe neglect of attitudes. Our students should graduate from our colleges with attitudes such that they:

- Realize they have only begun the process of self-education that never stops.
- Commit themselves to a life of continuing learning.
- Characterize the environment of learning that they have experienced as having been challenging, effective, rewarding, and fun.
- Reflect on a formal educational experience that valued them and their learning, and that provided the motivation for continuing to learn.

It is my contention that only a culture of collegiality can enable us to meet these attitudinal goals that are so essential. When students leave our colleges with negative attitudes about learning, about people, about the faculty, and the whole experience in general, we are not being successful in creating the caliber of learning, caring health professionals that our society requires and needs. Mager has said it very well in Developing Attitude Toward Learning, "to increase the likelihood of students continuing to learn, accentuate the positive conditions and consequences of learning, and eliminate the negative or the aversive conditions of learning." 15

Third, the quality of the interpersonal relationship between students and the faculty is a critical determinant of the success of the educational process. Faculty must work with students as colleagues. We must affirm that we are learners together on a professional pilgrimage. The attitudes and values essential for the success of our students are best, in fact only, taught by "modeling" the desired attitudes and corresponding behaviors. Harry Bruce, until his death Executive Director of the American Association of Dental Schools, challenged us, "call it 'hero worship' if you will, but admiration and emulation play an important role in shaping the professional lives of our students. If professors were to act as though they were role models for the students, and they are; the future of the profession would be secure." 16

The research literature on modeling suggests that if we want to maximize the tendencies of our students to develop specific desirable behaviors, we must exhibit those behaviors ourselves. We must behave in the way we want our students to behave. My students will remember very little about what I say, or the content of my instruction, but they will remember me. They will remember who I am, what I stood for, what I believed in, and most certainly how I treated them. My values, attitudes, and behaviors must be circumspect, and I must honor the tenets of collegiality that I am going to be a successful professor in a culture of collegiality. A leading medical educator expresses our role as professors powerfully and persuasively when he says "the role of a teacher is to inspire, enthuse, and challenge, and only then to inform and to educate."17

**Philosophy of Patient Care—**Every dimension of our collegiate mission and organizational health in dental education is dependent on doing well in caring for patients. The quality of education in a clinical profession such as ours is directly related to how we care for patients. We must care for our patients. Let me underscore care and point to the richness of the word and the idea. Unfortunately, it is a word we use with impunity today. As a result, it has almost come to mean "to handle" or "to manage patients" as in "you take care of them." But, care is a state in which something matters. Care is the opposite of apathy, indifference. When we do not care, to quote Rollo May, "we lose our humanness, our being."18 To care is to reaffirm, to restore our humanness. To care is to be concerned. To care is to have compassion, with compassion literally meaning a passion or drive to share in the hurt of another. Caring is to be empathic, to feel with. To care is to intend someone do well. In one sense caring for patients is tending for patients, tending them to do well with regard to their oral health, and placing ourselves at their service to enable that intention to be achieved. We must be dedicated to the behaviors that reflect a sincere concern for the welfare of our patients and for their oral health. Again I adapt the quote from Dr. Pellegreno, "a care which respects the freedom, dignity, and belief systems of the individual. A care which manifests itself in a sensitive, non-humiliating, and empathetic way of helping."19

In the midst of our technological revolution, there is a concern for losing our humanity. We must acknowledge this danger and daily strive not to mistake ends for means. Our patients are ends in themselves, never means for our ends. Any system that uses and manipulates patients; any system in which patients and their oral health care is valued primarily because it enables others to achieve their end, whether students or the faculty; any system where patients’ oral health is a means to someone else’s end rather than an end in itself, is an immoral system; a system that teaches by example all the wrong values, and a system that must be condemned and rejected.

A quality educational program in dentistry is predicated on a system of caring for patients that is worthy of emulation by our students. A culture of collegiality calls for treating patients as what they are, colleagues in the experience of being a human being; partners with us in gaining the benefits of oral health.
CONCLUSION

Our culture, that is, our norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions, determine our policies, practices, and procedures. My call is for a culture of collegiality; a culture in which we explicitly and ultimately value the inherent good and worth of every participant in our college communities, students, faculty, staff, and patients; a culture in which we affirm that we are pursuing the good of the college community in common; and a culture in which every person is treated as an end, a good in themselves, and never as a means, a thing, to be used in the achievement of someone else’s good or goal.

A collegial culture must be grounded in sound philosophies of administrative leadership, education, and patient care; and such philosophical foundations must be explicitly expressed, continually communicated, and passionately pursued by all members of the college community. A college’s creativity will be the only limitation in determining what form and practice our colleges’ lives take, after we have confirmed that we have heard the call and have become committed to a culture of collegiality. Such commitment will ensure that our dental education institutions are colleges of character.

REFERENCES