

SIMPLE TRUTHS

WE WRITE THESE WORDS AS OUR GOVERNMENT AND CITIZENS BATTLE (SOMETIMES LITERALLY) over health care reform and as our state and nation have lost two Kennedy siblings, one the longtime “Lion of the Senate” and the other the founder of the Special Olympics Program.

Since 1968, the Special Olympics has raised the quality of life and self-esteem of countless people with special needs. Eunice Kennedy Shriver also understood the benefits of good oral health. She paved the way for dentistry to be a part of the Special Olympics competitions, opening doors to dental care to a truly underserved population, many of whom had never received even rudimentary dental evaluation. One of our own members, Dr. Steve Perlman, spearheaded this effort, which has grown to worldwide dimensions and brought higher respect to all of us as a profession.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy was a champion for public health causes. Ironically, while it often seemed popular among our peers to oppose anything he said, far more often than not he fought for many of the same causes we, as a profession, also sought. Ted Kennedy and Eunice Kennedy Shriver were people of privilege who used their inherited advantages and natural talents to do what they could to improve the world around them. Whether or not we agree with all that they did, it cannot be argued that they left the world a better place.

However, this is not meant to be a political treatise. Your editors recently lost a mutual friend who was also one of our colleagues. He, like all of us, strived to provide the best care that he could to the people who entrusted their oral health to him. He was a consummate clinician. He, like any of us, was not perfect. He lived with the day-to-day challenges we all face. His passing, all too sudden, all too soon, is a reminder that we, as professionals, as family members, as citizens, and as friends, do not have infinite time to accomplish all we hope to do in any of the facets of our lives.

By the time you read this, national health care reform may be an accomplishment, a quagmire, or a total failure. No matter where we stand in the progress of any of the multitude of public efforts to improve the health of our society, some simple truths remain.

Our time allotment to accomplish our goals is unknown.

We are given the expectations of those who come to us for care to do our best to restore and maintain health.

Whether we are a senator, a philanthropist, or a dentist, we are obliged to try to leave the world a better place.

Our friend did.

Let's hope that in the very distant future, the same is said for each of us.

Our lives, individually and collectively, are precious. What really matters is how we live the life each of us is given, and what we do to leave the world a better place. ■



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