

**Testimony Prepared by The TMJ Association, Ltd.
for the Committee on the Future of Dental Education,
Institute of Medicine
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For the past half century, temporomandibular disorder has been assigned to the dental turf. The dental schools of this country should be the intellectual driving force for basic and clinical research on TMJ disorders and the repository of all that is known about this disorder. This knowledge is transferred to all students who pass through the educational system and results in treatment modalities being carried out on patients. Unfortunately, in the area of TMJ disorders, a meta-analysis in combination with a review of the literature reveals that what is known and being taught has little scientific validity, resulting in the failure of the dental profession to provide adequate care for, and solutions to, the problems of temporomandibular joint disorder patients. How could this have happened?

Perhaps Dr. Enid Neidle, former scientific director of the American Dental Association, has the answer. She states: "Where dental schools have done an exceedingly poor job, and continue to do so, is to incorporate those things into the curriculum that will create in their graduates an inquiring mind, a respect for science, a comprehension of what research means, and a deep understanding of how fundamental to the practice of dentistry scientifically generated knowledge is." She further speculates that "our raging controversies about the ... proper diagnosis and treatment of temporomandibular disorders reflect the failure of American dental schools to provide their students with any of the resources needed to develop what can only be described as a respect for science and an ability to learn from it."* The lack of scientific integrity described by Enid Neidle has resulted in anecdotal, mythical information from which treatment modalities evolved that can be either ineffective or iatrogenically cause the disorder. This is costly, particularly to the patients in terms of diminished quality of life, and/or loss of life, family, and finances, and also to the health care system.

Because there is no known etiology of TMJ disorders, because treatment outcomes frequently do not live up to the expectations of the dentist, the patient bears the brunt of the blame. Daily we hear from patients who have been subjected to the abuses of abandonment, dumping, fraud, and deceit. But even worse is the continuous accusation of the "psychological problems." This has recently been brought to light in the ugliest sense with the TMJ implant disaster. Patients with foreign body giant cell reaction eating away the condyle and fossa to the point of skull perforations, suffering disabling systemic pathology, are being told that "nothing is wrong -- it's all in your head. Get out of my office and don't come back." Animals have secured more rights in this country than many TMJ patients. Dr. Michael Merson, an official of the World Health Organization, in a recent speech stated that "there is a need to understand the interplay between health and human rights." It is time this dehumanization stops.

The following are our recommendations for dental school education regarding TMJ disorders:

1. Admit to the controversy surrounding the definition, diagnosis, and treatment of TMJ disorders and the resulting damage this has caused the patients. Acknowledge the realities of the clinical, systemic, and craniofacial pathology associated with

- TMD, and be honest about the limitations of the dental profession in the treatment of this disorder.
2. Solicit the appropriate basic scientists to apply their intellectual expertise and scientific protocols to TMD, and incorporate the medical professionals most qualified to treat the non-dental components of TMJ -- the muscle, joint, and pain disorders -- into the practice of TMJ treatment. Implied in this is the incorporation of TMJ disorders into the medical school curriculum.

We appreciate the opportunity we have had to testify on behalf of all TMJ patients. We feel strongly that our recommendations, if carried out, will be an important first step towards providing the many TMJ patients in this country with the humane care they need and deserve.

* Enid A. Neidle, Ph.D., "On the Brink -- Will Dental Education Be Ready for the Future?" *Journal of Dental Education*, Vol. 54, No. 9, 1990.