

Robert J. Rosenberg, DDS



VolunteerforGood

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Dear Fellow Docs,

In my November 2006 letter, I discussed some of the universal considerations that one examines when considering retirement. In my case, retirement was the only option, however I was able to phase out of practice over an eighteen month period. This provided some time to view the looming landscape of retirement.

As mentioned previously, one of the biggest obstacles that we face as health-care providers is the loss of patient contact and the feeling of contributing to the overall public health. If we stop to think about it, this notion of providing highly technical and, at the same time, compassionate health care is central to our well-being. It renders a reason to get up in the morning and feel good about ourselves at the end of the workday. As I began to see fewer and fewer patients, there were more and more mornings with less of a reason to get up and get out of the house. With the loss of patient contact came a loss of purpose that, for me, presented a significant challenge.

In previous generations, life may have ended at or around the age of fifty-six, but no longer. We are living much more active and purposeful lives after retiring and for many more years. I want those years to be fulfilling, not in the way that practice was fulfilling but in the knowledge that there is still plenty of time to make a societal contribution. The big question is "How can I bring meaning to my life now that the opportunities inherent in patient care no longer exist?"

For me, the blessing and the curse was having a blank canvas staring me directly in the face that seemed to invite reflection on what lay ahead. The first decision was to fulfill any remaining lecture commitments but not to accept any more concerning clinical endodontics. Not that folks were banging down my door, but I decided that given the pace of change in the field, it would not take too long before I was stale and old news. The second was to reject the idea of clinical teaching for the same reason as well as the fact that if retirement was due to physical problems, I would not be able to help students sufficiently at chairside.

This realization was a blessing in that it shouted out the need to consider another vehicle for finding the meaning lost by no longer delivering patient care. The answer, for me was readily apparent. Some sort of volunteer or philanthropic activity would fulfill the need to "do good" and would partially replace the now missing feeling of having aided a person in need. Now then, just what was this effort to look like?

A partial answer presented itself in the form of a friend who was not retired, but whose business had been sold. Guy Lampard had the free time and the inclination to join in this effort. We decided to partner in the creation of a volunteer or philanthropic venture when we realized that in order to be a philanthropist, one should have sufficient resources to divest. This epiphany left us with the idea of volunteering. We started by visiting our local Volunteer Center, named Marin Nexus and speaking with their Executive Director, Suzie Pollock. She provided a wealth of information concerning the nonprofit world in our backyard, Marin County, California. We next met with a nonprofit consultant, Skip Henderson who was a friend of Guy's and who also had

been a patient of mine. During the conversation, Skip helped us to realize that we were not alone in wanting to engage in meaningful community service and that there was a huge number of people with the same questions that were rolling around in our minds. He suggested that we write the book to provide answers to the questions of how to get started in volunteering. It seemed like a good idea to us.

So two years later, after countless hours on the internet, with visits to Portland, Phoenix and Minneapolis, *Giving from Your Heart, A Guide to Volunteering*. was published. Piece of cake? Not really.

Next time, I'll talk about starting the nonprofit *Volunteer For Good*, creating its web site, incorporating and filing for tax-exempt status.

Best regards,

Bob

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If you would like to purchase *Giving from Your Heart*, click this link: <http://www.volunteerforgood.org/>

