



## Preface



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*Guest Editors*

This issue of *Dental Clinics of North America* is a succinct examination of the discipline of dental public health. As guest editors, we have provided a platform on which the many facets of the discipline could be presented and describe its vast domain and truly interdisciplinary nature. We expect that the readers of this issue will develop a deeper understanding of the relevance of dental public health to the practice of clinical dentistry. In the interest of brevity and trimming redundancy, topics related to dental public health that have been addressed by other recent issues of *Dental Clinics of North America* were not included here.

While this publication is in production, the presidential primaries are underway. Once again, access to health care and the increasing expenditures for health care services are being intensely debated. Changes in the organization and financing of health care leading to an increased number of individuals covered by social insurance programs could have positive consequences for the oral health status of Americans. Reports at the state and national levels are focusing on access to dental care, particularly for underserved populations. In addition, many other converging factors will present enormous challenges to the dental care delivery system over the next decade, including an aging population, changes in the ethnic composition of the country, dental student debt levels, minority and special needs populations' health disparities, limited health care dollars for oral health, and ineffective delivery systems.

As solutions to these challenges are explored, the role of the discipline of dental public health seems to be destined to expand its responsibility and

sphere of influence. As a clinical specialist, the public health dentist provides direct care in public health settings. In addition, he or she participates in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of preventive and therapeutic programs, placing substantial emphasis on populations that have difficulties accessing the dental care delivery system. Although the role of public health dentists is important, the development and implementation of large systemic solutions will require the input, active involvement, and expertise of professional associations, dental educators, researchers, public health agencies, private industry, and consumer groups. In this issue, the contributing authors have pointed this out from their different perspectives.

Any publication is a collaborative enterprise. Certainly, a publication such as this one, where the work of various contributors is integrated, owes much to the work of many individuals. As editors, we were responsible for the selection of topics and contributors, and we provided feedback to authors for improvements in their articles. This publication has benefited from the inspiration, cooperation, and wisdom of many people: notably, Dr. Richard Haug at the University of Kentucky College of Dentistry for championing this idea, and Mr. John Vassallo at Elsevier/Saunders for his substantial support and ample guidance in putting this issue together. Most of all, this publication owes its content to a committed group of experts who readily agreed to contribute to this issue despite their busy schedules.

Oral health is an integral component of general health and well-being and a basic human right. As such, it must be available and attainable by all Americans.

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