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The Blog of the American Student Dental Association

Practicing corporate social responsibility as a dentist

by [Angela Walter](#) | May 7, 2018



Dr. Daniel Braun (left), a volunteer at HealthLink, with Dr. Gary Morreale (right), the director of undergraduate endodontology at Temple University and director of the HealthLink endodontic outpatient clinic, in front of a plaque commemorating the founders of the HealthLink Dental Clinic.

After 45 years in private practice, Dr. Daniel Braun can still say, “HealthLink is better than any place I’ve seen in private practice. Period. And it’s free. If you can beat that, you show me where.” Dr. Braun has volunteered at the HealthLink Dental Clinic in Southampton, Pennsylvania, ever since retiring in 2004. After 14 years with the clinic, the 1968 graduate from Baltimore College of Dental Surgery still ranks it supreme in care.

Why? Because of its dedication to corporate social responsibility (CSR), or a company’s sense of responsibility toward the community. CSR may be a more relished practice in the business realm, but maybe it’s time it takes a front seat in the dental world.

A Dec. 29, 2017, article in [Business News Daily](#) explains four main avenues to CSR: environmental efforts, philanthropy, ethical labor practices and volunteering. HealthLink shows CSR in its community by implementing philanthropy, ethical labor practices and volunteering. It seeks to raise the community's overall health and economic status, and the organization treats patients who "otherwise have never or may never go to the dentist," says Raquel Braemer, HealthLink's development director.

Braemer understands the population she serves and the union between oral health and economic security. She explains that by providing dental care, "you're improving [the patient's] self-esteem. You're giving them a better ability to go out and get a job."

Braemer reiterates the findings of a June 2016 ADA Health Policy Institute report. She says, "One in five adults experience anxiety due to the condition of their mouth that will prevent them from going into social situations and taking chances. Thirty-nine percent of low-income adults say, in general, life is less satisfying due to the condition of their mouth." Oral health impacts everything, from systemic health to economic sustainability. As dentists, we have the power to impact both.

A May 23, 2017, article published in [The New York Times](#) states, "Experts have long observed that people's teeth both reflect and reinforce poverty." Quoted in the article is Harold Pollack, a scholar of poverty at the University of Chicago. After being in public health research for 25 years, Pollack says, "One common element of every severely vulnerable population I've worked with is people always have bad teeth. And they have always borne a real stigma with that."

HealthLink was created for people with this "stigma," a vulnerable population of low-wage earning adults. To be treated at the clinic, patients must be at least 18 years old, lack dental insurance, be currently employed or married to someone employed, and earn less than 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

Bela Amado is a champion of CSR at HealthLink. She has been their clinic coordinator and dental hygienist for the last five years. She doesn't just clean teeth, she says, she also builds relationships with her patients.

"I know about their families, their struggles, their stories. You hug [them], and you cry together," she says. One of her patients was terrified of the dentist. She even cried during her first two appointments. Now, Amado says, "She calls me for an appointment. If I made a difference in that one person's life, it's worth it."

Dr. Braun explains that the compassion given in this type of care is even more important than the dentistry he does. "You can have all this fancy stuff, but unless you care, unless you're gentle, unless you're understanding, it doesn't make any difference."

HealthLink also strives to educate the public. It is one of their CSR values. They use marketing and outreach for free oral cancer screenings to raise public awareness. They provide a glucose test for every new patient and now have A1C kits to treat the patient systemically. They made it their personal responsibility to improve the overall health in their community.

Dr. Gary Morreale is the director of undergraduate endodontology at Temple University and the director of the HealthLink endodontic outpatient clinic. He says that we are "influencing people. [It's] more than just doing root canals. It's an opportunity."

How we make the most of this opportunity is up to us. Maybe once you're in practice, you transform into a free clinic for one week. Or you provide facilities for handicapped patients who find it difficult to be treated elsewhere. Spend an extra 15 minutes in your schedule to hear and understand a patient's hardships and barriers. Provide oral health awareness to local elementary schools. Offer veterans care on the weekends. Find a local organization to rally with and donate to. Organize a mission to serve a village that's rarely received dental care. Provide regular oral cancer screenings to your community. Sponsor a child's dream through your revenue.

HealthLink is focused on volunteerism, giving back to a greater purpose and social growth, in addition to its attention to care for individual patients and their community as a whole — all because it is dedicated to CSR.

What is your CSR?

~Angela Walter, Temple '20, Contributing Editor, Operation Smile VP

contour *extended*

This blog post is an extension of the Student Perspective article, "[Dentists embrace the business world to create change](#)," published in the May 2018 issue of Contour.



About [Angela Walter](#)

Angela Walter is a third-year dental student at the Kornberg School of Dentistry at Temple University. She is passionate about journalism and using it to make a lasting impact for dental public health. She is an ASDA contributing editor and loves writing messages to motivate her colleagues in the dental profession. She serves as membership chair for her local ASDA chapter and advocates for children with craniofacial differences as the vice president of the Temple Dental Operation Smile Club. Angela invests her weekends at her church as a greeter, photographer and children's ministry leader. She loves people and loves to serve.