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# Dentists embrace the business world to create change

**CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY** is a well-known concept in the business realm, but not so familiar in our dental world. Yet it should be. CSR is defined as “a company’s sense of responsibility toward the community and environment (both ecological and social) in which it operates.” Many dentists make it their personal responsibility to impact society beyond their dental chair. Maybe it’s time we make it a basic responsibility of our profession.

The Financial Times lexicon explains that CSR spans many practices and can take on different forms, but, ultimately, its core purpose is to “drive change toward sustainability.” HealthLink Dental Clinic of Southampton, Pennsylvania, is a force driving sustainability in Bucks and Montgomery counties. It elevates the health of the community as a whole.

It should be our daily mission as dentists to advocate for economic and social growth. Beyond oral care and hygiene, we are stewards of human rights, corporate governance, health and safety, environmental effects, working conditions and the contribution to economic development — all of which are included in the Financial Times’ broader definition of CSR. HealthLink is a steward of these initiatives listed. Its mission stands to “improve the overall health of qualified low-wage earning adults by providing free preventative and restorative dental services and oral health education.” Its vision is to create a community where everyone has access to dental care.



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



One HealthLink goal is linking patients with other community resources including medical and behavioral health services, housing and food assistance, and care guidance. A few extra minutes in our quality of care can impact a patient's quality of life for years.

HealthLink has just extended its service qualifications to veterans. They receive no government assistance or insurance. They are a nonprofit functioning solely on charitable contributions from the community. It is fuel for the community, driven by the community. Why does it matter? Because our footprint will be bigger than the mouths we heal. It needs to be, or we have missed the purpose of our profession altogether. It needs to be about creating change in lives and communities.

A December 2017 article from the Business News Daily says, "Today's consumers are looking for more than just high-quality products and services when they make a purchase. They're prioritizing CSR and holding corporations accountable for effecting social change

with their business beliefs, practices and profits." We administer high-quality products and services through our dental care. But then what? How do we master the CSR, business beliefs and practices that are important to patients?

We can achieve this by prioritizing and implementing the pillars HealthLink already has: patient value and community access. The article explains the intangible values that are higher in demand, such as expanding service to military veterans, having an onsite translator and providing outreach for oral cancer screenings. Can it be quantified in numbers and stats? No. Does it add invaluable quality to lives? Yes.

Dentists are sometimes portrayed first as business owners and money makers, even before medical providers and head-and-neck specialists. So instead of fighting it, let's be the best at it and do it with excellence. Let's prove our patients right, in that, yes, we make money for the years of expertise in which we are highly trained. But let's prove them wrong in why we

make money and how we use it. We can be excellent stewards of resources and finances.

A 2017 study by Cone Communications says 87 percent of Americans would purchase a product because a company supports an issue they care about, and 60 percent hope businesses will drive social and environmental change. Dentistry is the hybrid of medical and business, and we get to drive that change.

We can let our future practice sustain something we and our patients care deeply about. They want to join in something to fight for and give back to, so let's give them that. HealthLink stands to drive the economics of their community back up and ensure every low-wage earner can have access to dental care. We, too, must embrace a way to enhance our community. ●



HealthLink Dental Clinic's vision is to create a community where everyone has access to dental care.

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