An interview with Dr Raymond Gist, new President of the American Dental Association

What’s ADA doing in terms of ethnic diversity?

Dr Raymond Gist: My primary objective is to help unite and amplify the voice of dental professionals in advocating for the delivery of quality oral healthcare to those that are underprivileged in the United States and abroad.

We also intend to deliver a loud, consistent message to the public and all concerned stakeholders that oral health is a priority. Oral health is essential to overall health, which is why I want to bring increased national and global attention to the need for providing and sustaining good dental health.

What are currently the main problems for dentists practicing in the US?

The United States offers tremendous opportunities for those wanting to practice dentistry. The US economy has affected some dental practices more than others, but the economy is getting better as we slowly emerge from our recession. As for our new dentists, many of them are facing tremendous debt obligations from dental school and we must look for ways to assist them in reducing debt and also in establishing their own private practices if they choose to do so.

The ADA’s recent public apology reinforces its commitment to a diverse membership. The ADA Officers and Board of Trustees felt compelled to act after the striking personal testimony presented during the June 2010 National Summit on Diversity in Dentistry on the history of exclusion in organized dentistry. The summit was jointly planned and convened by the National Dental Association (NDA), Hispanic Dental Association (HDA), Society of American Indian Dentists, and the ADA. In July and September, the ADA Board developed and approved resolutions that were designed to strengthen diversity and inclusion in the profession.

As the first African-American president of the ADA, do you feel political pressure?

I don’t feel a special pressure to perform because of my race, but I do pressure myself to deliver that message effectively and consistently.

Thank you very much for the interview.

(Edited by Daniel Zimmermann, DTI)