

National Prosthodontics Awareness Week Celebrated in March

By Jonathan P. Wiens, D.D.S., M.S.D.

ACP President-Elect, 2010 NPAW Chair

Across the U.S. and Canada approximately 400 ACP members participated in the first National Prosthodontics Awareness Week on March 7-13, which included a variety of activities. These activities ranged from: pro bono care, oral cancer screening, oral health fairs, free examinations for the homeless or for those who lacked access to care, distribution of prosthodontic literature and letters to referring doctors, lunch and learn sessions for dental students, formal presentations to dental and medical faculty, open houses, university postings, to public radio and television talk shows regarding the value of prosthodontic care.

Subsequent interviews and debriefings of participants revealed several events that worked well while others might need enhancement. Most ACP members reported learning about NPAW through the ACP Messenger and Wednesday Morning Wakeup Calls, followed by the Annual Session or meetings with the Regional Directors and Section Presidents. Nearly all participants supported the goals for NPAW to raise public awareness about the critical importance of oral health and how to best care for teeth. Additionally, the need to increase awareness of the reduced cost and quality care that can be obtained at dental schools or the awareness about the numerous services provided by prosthodontists in their local communities, including pro bono care, need to be highlighted. Several of the participants reported that those in the audience “did not know what a prosthodontist is or does, but were delighted to learn” underscoring the need to create greater exposure.

A few responders did not feel comfortable with the way NPAW was presented, noting that “public awareness” campaigns usually intend to publicize a disease or social problem such as cancer or child abuse and should not be self-promoting. Others believed that complacency was still high among some prosthodontists who may not recognize the importance of the “grass roots” effort and the essential need to address issues of tooth loss, or deficient esthetics or function, TMD and oral cancer, etc. Most survey respondents found the NPAW Toolkit to be helpful, but desired more information and guidance or “boilerplate” materials that one could access and feel comfortable using to promote the specialty, as it allows us to be all on the “same page.” A strong message reverberated within the affirmative comments that we need to “keep communicating the vision and goals associated with NPAW” and for a first attempt “we made significant accomplishments.”

The first NPAW “is but a beginning” as noted by those survey respondents reporting that they reached nearly 4,670 individuals. Significantly more individuals were involved but their measurable influence remains unreported at this time. Some believed the NPAW impact might be difficult to gauge as most activities were targeted to groups and not to the general public at large. Nevertheless, nearly every participant indicated that they would be even more involved next Spring, in 2011. Give thought now in planning for next year by contacting your Section President or

Regional Membership Director. Recommendations for new ideas should be submitted to Ms. Nathalie Williams, Sections & Governance Manager, by e-mail at nwilliams@prosthodontics.org.