Dear reader,

As the year draws to a close I would like to extend my best wishes for 2009 to all our readers. The problem we all face next year is uncertainty about the future. The financial crisis that started on Wall Street this autumn has just begun to unfold in other parts of the world, and although there are many opinions about the short- and long-term effects, no one is really able to foresee whether it will take us only a few months or in the years to come.

The latest news from the market place in Asia is not very promising. China, as one of the key players in the region, has just witnessed its largest drop in exports in nearly a decade. At the same time, foreign direct investment has fallen by 56.5 per cent compared to November 2008. The Asia Development Bank in Manila recently predicted a significant slowdown in economic growth of more than 5 per cent for the entire region. Policy makers and industry players have to act swiftly if the industry is to withstand the crisis.

Prospects look rather uncertain for the dental profession, in recent years, dentistry in most markets has been driven mainly by high-cost procedures, like dental implants and cosmetics, but these sectors will probably be the first to suffer from the economic slowdown. One of the factors that could help the profession is health tourism. Ironically, fuel prices have seen a sharp decrease in the last two months, which could boost the influx of patients from overseas to destinations like Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Despite what happens in 2009, we will continue to put our best efforts into informing you of the latest developments in dentistry. We hope that you will benefit from this information and possibly meet you there or at future international events.

We wish you a successful and happy New Year in 2009.

Daniel Zimmermann
Group Editor
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Encouragement... 

We tend to believe that among all the stressful professions in the world, it is dentists who have the highest suicide rate. Many people feel stress when they go to the dentist, and it is only logical to assume that the dentist must also feel the end result of all of that stress. Not to mention listening to all of the patients who say, “No, of course, but I hate the dentist!” You may be surprised to learn that there is little evidence that dentists are more prone to stress-related suicides than the general population, according to an article in the May 2001 issue of the Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA).

When a myth is repeated enough times over a long period of time, it begins to be accepted as the truth. Since 1975, when the popular press and professional media have repeatedly portrayed dentists as being suicide-prone, Dr Roger K. Alexander, D.D.S., professor, Baylor College of Dentistry, The Texas A&M University System Health Science Center, Dallas. Over the past twenty years, there has been little attempt to verify this claim. There are however, valid statistics on the general health issue. According to the Centers for Disease Control, suicide rates in all age groups are higher for Americans in 1998 (11.5 per 100,000 population), and more people die from suicide than from homicide. In 1998, there were 1.7 times as many suicides as homicides, and overall, suicide is the eighth leading cause of death for all Americans, and is the third leading cause of death for young people aged 15–24. Although there is no shortage of statistic on suicide, there appears to be no evidence that dentists are at any higher risk than the general population, according to the journal’s study.

While I won’t argue that dentistry can be stressful at times, I think it’s fair to say that people in any occupation can feel stress while working. It is also important to point out that it is mental distress that has been portrayed as the main cause of stress-related suicides, not stress, that are associated with more than 90 per cent of all cases of suicide. Suicide among dentists, physicians, and other health care professionals is a serious issue beyond the responsibility of caring for others. Fortunately, recent research has not confirmed a high suicide rate among dentists.