The American Board of Pediatric Dentistry, which began in 1940 as the American Board of Pedodontics with only a handful of diplomates, now consists of 83% of eligible members of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. While the certification process has evolved, ABPD’s commitment to clinical excellence, lifelong learning and self-validation endures. The journey to becoming a diplomate can be as meaningful as the achievement. In this issue of PDT, we wish to highlight the journey of one diplomate.

As this individual completed her residency training in the early 1990’s, the certification process transitioned from four to three parts to be completed within seven years. Within two years of finishing her training, she successfully completed the first and second parts, leaving five years to complete the last part by site visit or submitting four clinical cases that required pre- and post-treatment documentation of a minimum 12-month interval.

In spite of her ardent determination to complete the certification process, common life-changing events, such as relocation, job change, childbirths and family commitments, intervened. Also, there were practice parameters beyond her control; workplace less than ideal for a site visit and difficulty in locating archived records. She could think of many more reasons delaying her completing the process, and the seven-year deadline was fast approaching.

While she was on her second maternity leave, and within a month of her eligibility expiring, she called Dr. James Roche, the ABPD’s executive director, explaining her situation and hoping he would grant her an extension. Instead, he suggested she quickly gather the cases she had prepared and submit them before the deadline; she could provide more documentation later if needed.

That was a more favorable response than an extension, but she was unable to convince herself to follow Dr. Roche’s advice. She believed that quickly submitting the cases would not represent her work well, and she would not relish the experience, compromising the essence of self-validation. After all, in spite of all her major life events, perhaps she did procrastinate, and she had no one but herself to blame. Also, optimistically, she trusted that preparing for a repeat examination would benefit her and her patients. That was 1999.

Eventually, in 2004, she retook the written examination and passed. Fortuitously, shortly after that, the certification process was simplified to the current two parts. She successfully completed the Oral Clinical Examination in 2006 and became board certified, finally, 15 years after completing her residency program.

Well, this happened to be my journey, and it was by no means unique. Indeed, many veteran diplomates endured the arduous four-part process and collected umpteen interesting and memorable hardship stories along the way. Some didn’t begin the certification process until many years after leaving their training programs. While becoming a diplomate was the goal, the journey itself was no less important. To me, it mattered immensely.

The willingness to partake in this journey, regardless of how long or short speaks to our commitment to excellence, lifelong learning and self-validation. As our specialty continues to thrive, and with ABPD’s goal for more eligible AAPD members to become board certified, these individual journeys are what define our achievements.

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