



## Member Spotlight

### **Challenging the Dental Establishment: Instituting a Standard of Care for TMJD (TMD)**

*Robert Owre Uppgaard, D.D.S.*

*A Member Since March 2002*



As he came ashore on D-Day to tend the wounded at Normandy Beach, Robert Uppgaard realized that he was going to have to be very resourceful with his little medical bag if he was to live up to the United States Navy Seabee's motto of **Can Do**. Ever since that moment he strove to challenge the impossible in health and wellness issues, and his long career as a dentist specializing in Temporomandibular Joint Disorders (TMJD) is a testament to this high level of dedication.

After the war, Dr. Uppgaard or Dr. Bob as he prefers to be called, enrolled at the University of Minnesota as an undergraduate to study chemistry and zoology. Upon graduating with a B.S. degree, he continued on at the university in its dentistry program, which was considered top in the world after World War II, and earned a D.D.S. with honors. Interestingly, Dr. Bob comes from a family of dentists and was even named after a second cousin, Alfred Owre, who was Dean of the College of Dentistry at the University of Minnesota in the early 1900s. Dr. Bob also did two years of post-graduate studies in oral Pathology at the University and was a part-time clinical instructor. Later in his career, he returned as a part-time clinical professor in a trouble-shooting capacity for patients suffering from TMJD.

Following his post-graduate studies, Dr. Bob opened his dental practice in Minneapolis and subsequently in Northern Minnesota and began specializing in treating patients with TMJD. In 1974, he participated in the People to People Tour of professionals to Europe and the former Soviet Union. He was especially fascinated to learn how dentists behind the Iron Curtain were treating TMJD in their own patients. Immediately after he came back to the United States, he found that he had been awarded a prestigious fellowship at the Academy of General Dentistry in Washington D.C. In addition to learning and practicing innovative dental techniques, he also continued his observations and research on TMJD.

To raise awareness of TMJD in the early 1980s, Dr. Bob co-sponsored and moderated a series of annual seminars, the Whitefish Dental Seminars, which were focused on TMJD and craniofacial pain management. Throughout his career, he has continued to advocate for increased attention of dentists to this disorder, both in their training and in their practice. Unfortunately, even today dentists cannot agree on a standard of treatment for TMJ.

Consequently, many people are either over-treated or under-treated, but not properly treated. This lack of appropriate treatment is often due to a combination of factors: the lack of education about TMJD in dental schools and the fact that most insurance companies will not reimburse treatment for TMJD precisely because there is not yet a uniformly accepted treatment standard.

To counter this pervasive trend, Dr. Bob wrote a book in the late 1990s entitled, "Taking Control of TMJ," which is a comprehensive guide designed to help sufferers of the disorder better understand it, relieve its symptoms, prevent its recurrence and avoid unnecessary surgery. In conjunction with his book, Dr. Bob has also been helping people with TMJD from around the world alleviate their suffering through his website and forum, *Ask Dr. Uppgaard*. One of the major professional goals he hopes to achieve is to have his book integrated into the curriculum of all United States dental schools as a patient education tool by the end of 2002. Dr. Bob believes that his principal contribution to dentistry was giving the field direction in regards to effectively diagnosing and treating people with TMJD. He is grateful that he has been able to help so many individuals.

In addition to his passion for improving human health, Dr. Bob is a dedicated environmentalist. Almost single handedly he enhanced -- over a period of 15 years -- a wildlife refuge near a lake in Northern Minnesota by planting over 6,000 native trees. Dr. Bob and his wife, Barb, donated the land as a recreation park, the Uppgaard Wildlife Management Area, which attracts both national and international visitors.

The Uppgaard Wildlife Management Area is Minnesota's first "Landscaping for Wildlife Demonstration Area." Landscaping for wildlife techniques have been used in this area and include nest boxes and loafing structures, tree and shrub plantings for all seasons, butterfly, bee and moth plants and wildflower plantings, raptor nesting and perching sites, a snake hibernation mound and brush piles. The area is composed of 110 pristine acres of woods and ponds that also contain numerous hiking and cross country skiing trails.