

THE EDITOR'S CORNER

Tilting at Windmills

Don *Quixote* is a Spanish satirical novel first published in 1605 by Miguel de Cervantes. In the story, a nobleman named Alonso Quijano becomes delusional after reading too many romance books, and he transforms his life into a fantasy. He decides to become a wandering knight in search of chivalrous feats to perform, under the nom de guerre Don Quixote de la Mancha, and he recruits a farmer, Sancho Panza, as his squire.

Among Quixote's many battles with imaginary enemies is his memorable attack on windmills, which he mistakes for giants: "Do you see over yonder, friend Sancho, 30 or 40 hulking giants? I intend to do battle with them and slay them." "What giants?" asks Sancho Panza. "Those you see over there," replies his master, "with their long arms [the sails]. Some of them have arms well-nigh two leagues in length." Despite Sancho's warning not to mistake the windmills for anything but what they are, Quixote rides in bravely with lance in hand. When he gets too close to one of the windmills, he is knocked off his horse before comprehending his mistake. The absurdity of Quixote's action epitomizes his separation from reality.

From this story comes the idiom "tilting at windmills." (*Tilting* is a historical term for jousting.) Specifically, the expression describes an unnecessary confrontation in which an adversary is perceived falsely, and the aggressor's course of action is based on heroic idealism. Since the windmills were not an actual threat, Quixote's attack on them was an exercise in futility that left both his pride and body wounded.

As orthodontists, we are often guilty of tilting at windmills. For example, we tell ourselves stories about the orthodontist up the street or on social media whom we scarcely know but are cer-

tain we despise. We do the same with orthodontic products that we refuse to embrace or treatment philosophies that differ from our own. Like Don Quixote, we do not always see the complex world for what it is; instead, we believe we are living out a story in which we are the gallant knight.

In 2019, to help diminish the "tilting" that can arise from misunderstanding, I created a private Facebook group, the Metropolitan Orthodontic Support Group, for local orthodontists and residents in Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Maryland. Our members discuss cases, post clinical pearls, ask practice-management questions, and even share family photos every Friday. To date, we have nearly 700 members. Our primary goal is to promote camaraderie among colleagues.

What else can be done to avoid tilting at windmills? Perhaps the best solution is to find your Sancho Panza: a close colleague who can serve as an interlocutor and might have a different perspective from your own. In the book, Sancho balanced Quixote's lofty rhetoric with practicality and wisdom. Quixote ultimately needed his squire to guide him on their journey. After talking it through with your Sancho, perhaps that orthodontist up the street won't seem so dreadful, or that treatment approach so misguided.

Don Quixote ends with the knight back home on his deathbed, where a dream provides him with insight into final judgment. In his last hour, he regains his sanity and takes confession, renouncing his chivalrous tales as false—he is back to being Quijano the Good. The story of *Don Quixote* teaches us to live life passionately and develop a strong identity, but always to remember that while our perceptions can seem very real, they are not always based on the facts. NDK