

President's Column

IT'S YOUR FUTURE



Dr. Burton Conrod

For most practitioners, concerns about how oral health care will be delivered in 20 years pale in comparison to the everyday pressures of patient care, business and family life. Judging by the way dental treatment has changed over my 25 years in practice, we would be wise to plan for the future in order to maximize the use of human and financial resources in achieving optimal oral health for Canadians.

The leadership of CDA began to focus on the future at our planning session last fall. The *JCDA* editor, Dr. John O'Keefe, presented several possible future scenarios, and executive council and senior staff examined them in light of changing demographics, technology, economics, social values and government policy.

The scenarios ranged from "The Revenge of the Buyers of Care" to "The Platinum Age of Dentistry." In the "Revenge" scenario, all dentists are employed by large managed care corporations that dictate practice

guidelines and control treatment decisions, while CDA negotiates improved working conditions on their behalf. In the "Platinum Age," patients and benefits providers recognize the value of prevention and the majority of people want comprehensive care. This includes the wealthy, health-conscious, aging baby boomers along with the disadvantaged who are covered by a federally funded denticare program.

Executive council plans to revisit this discussion at subsequent planning sessions in an attempt to achieve the most favourable scenario. It is up to organized dentistry to influence the future direction of oral health care, and a strong national association should be able to do this.

The American Dental Association (ADA) is also considering the future of dentistry. I attended the first open hearing of their task force during the ADA annual session in Chicago last October. They are attempting to predict future developments by tracking various aspects of dentistry such as education, research, clinical practice, access to care, regulations and international dentistry. I also attended the ADA's public conference in March where my colleagues and I reviewed the background material gathered by the 6 expert panels that are drafting the ADA report.

Participants at the American conference identified the exact issues that we had discussed in November, as concerns that must be dealt with to assure positive future outcomes. Fragmentation of the profession and difficulty in recruiting and retaining dental faculty were high on the list of concerns. The cost of dental education, labour mobility, and changing demographics and treatment needs were also important. This is obviously an area where continued sharing of

ideas and data will benefit both CDA and ADA members.

The issues that must be influenced in order to achieve favourable outcomes in the future are of such significance that individual practitioners may feel unable to make an impact. A simple way for every dentist in Canada to have a positive influence on the future of dentistry is by contributing each year to the Dentistry Canada Fund (DCF). DCF has programs dealing with almost every issue we need to influence. If we wish to realize the "Platinum Age," we all have to do our part.

Increasing our investment in dentistry's own charity will have a positive effect on the quality of dental education because DCF supports many educational initiatives including student development, research and teaching conferences. The McGill Dental Outreach Program is showing us new ways to deliver care to those who were previously unable to access treatment, and DCF support is critical if this type of endeavour is to spread. Development of new dental materials can only be pursued in Canadian dental faculties if support from the profession via DCF increases. DCF support gives CDA a voice at meetings of the International Standards Organization (ISO) where standards are set for the materials we use. The Children's Charity Fund of DCF is funding treatment for children with disabilities and traumatic injuries. In short, DCF has a powerful and positive influence on the future of dentistry.

I know my convictions are shared by the dentists who are already regular contributors to DCF and I urge you to think about what you can do to make a difference as well. After all, it is your future!

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