



CANADIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION

October 15, 2007

Letters to the Editor
National Post
letters@nationalpost.com

Dear Editor:

Re: Extend dental coverage, doctors urge

On behalf of Canadian dentists, I am writing in response to the article in Saturday's edition of the National Post entitled "Extend dental coverage, doctors urge." Judging by the attention in this article, from the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), and from all parties involved in the Ontario election campaigns, dental care has quickly "gotten legs" as a public policy debate. A good thing, if you ask me – and long overdue. So, I'd like to extend a thank you to CMA president, Dr. Day for sharing his time in the media spotlight with this issue.

Perhaps because the dental care system for the most part does an excellent job of providing high quality care to the majority of Canadians in a timely fashion, or perhaps because it falls almost entirely outside the medicare system, oral health care has not typically been a policy focus. Nonetheless, the Canadian Dental Association (CDA) anticipated many years ago the need to extend dental coverage to those for whom access to care may be a problem.

In our 2001 brief to the Romanow Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada, CDA argued for a needs-based approach to the creation of a social safety net aimed at providing oral care services to socio-economically disadvantaged Canadians. We further defined how such an approach should be structured, in order to maximize the positive impact: patients should be free to attend the dentist of their choice; long-term relationships between dentists and patients should be encouraged and fostered; dentists and patients should be able to make treatment decisions in joint consultation, free from third-party interference based on coverage; it should be recognized that dentists are the only oral health care providers who are able to diagnose and make full oral health plans for patients; and that a patient's private health information should be protected both by the dentist providing care and by government institutions providing funding for care.

In our experience, governments have not always managed existing public dental plans in a way that focuses resources on care, rather than administration. Not to say that their hearts are not in the right place, but perhaps the expert knowledge has been lacking.

This is where CDA, provincial and territorial associations and dental regulatory authorities can step in with the knowledge and skills to inform the debate. Dentists welcome the day that every Canadian has access to oral health care. Come – ask. As the experts in delivering that care, we are ready, willing and able to engage in the unfolding discussions.

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Smith', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Darryl Smith
President
Canadian Dental Association