

# President's Column

## CDA, A FAMILY IN TRANSITION



Dr. John Diggins

My close friends and colleagues know that I'm a family man. They also know that as much as I love dentistry and appreciate the opportunities it has afforded me — including the privilege of being CDA president this year — none of it would matter if I didn't have my wife Tierney and our five children to share it with. My family is probably no different from yours: we deeply respect and care for each other, we share common goals and we support each other in good times and bad. As much as we've heard lately about how the "traditional" family is changing, I am confident that the core values defining our relationships to those we love will remain the same no matter how the family evolves over time.

I see these same family values as being fundamental to my "other" family — organized dentistry. And yes, we are also a family in transition. Mr. Jardine Neilson, CDA's executive director for the past 14 years, will be leaving at the end of December. Thanks to his expertise in association management, CDA is stronger than ever. Our issues management process, for example, has allowed us to fully assume our mandate of

promoting the public interest and of being the national voice for organized dentistry — and we've got the track record to prove it. As chair of the search committee for the next executive director, I can tell you I am very confident that our new director will build on these achievements and create a positive, contemporary culture that will carry us forward into the next decade.

Mr. Neilson was also instrumental in helping develop the Connectedness process, CDA's strategy to build closer relations with its corporate members. I was also involved in this strategic initiative as well as in the joint consultation session, part of a parallel process set up for CDA to develop a stronger relationship with the dental regulatory authorities (DRAs). The purpose of these two initiatives was for our partners to consider what they want CDA to be and do on behalf of organized dentistry. The natural outcome of this process was the tripartite meeting held in Halifax during our annual convention — the first ever meeting of corporate members, DRAs and CDA together. All participants looked long and hard at the roles and responsibilities, structure and funding within the dental family and have come up with a set of recommendations which, if implemented, will make the association more dynamic and responsive to the needs of members and stakeholders. I am definitely excited about the opportunity we have to usher in a new era of increased interaction and cooperation.

I believe that this re-examination of our relationships will serve to unify the profession and enhance our profile. Vision 2010 is another step in that direction. The vision statement aims to position CDA as a leader in oral health care. It was developed to address both internal and external changes affecting our profession, including social, economic and technological changes. For example, the current economic environment has brought the scope of practice

issue back to the fore. CDA's vision statement certainly involves strategic alliances with other groups with whom we have common interests and goals, but our position also allows us to respect our differences and accept that we will sometimes be at opposite ends of an issue. That acceptance is evidence of our maturity and of our confidence in being able to assume that leadership role.

We will be formally acknowledging all the sources and forces of change with Dialogue 2000, a series of workshops that will be launched in March and will continue during the year. Topics covered will include competencies in dental education and practice, clinical practice guidelines, evidence-based dentistry, and the economic forces affecting the profession. I'm hopeful that Dialogue 2000 will be productive and beneficial as we analyze future scenarios and determine their impact on oral health care and dentistry.

It will be a busy year indeed. And an exciting one, I'm sure. I know my wife and children have always shared my sense of adventure for wherever dentistry has taken us. I hope you feel the same excitement as we chart a course into new territory and reaffirm our bonds as a dental family. In spite of all the changes, our common goal remains the same: rising to the challenge of ensuring the delivery of oral health care for Canadians.

I'm counting on the support and advice of members of CDA management, executive council and the board this year, just as I'm looking forward to hearing from many of you as I travel the country. Until our paths cross, however, I invite you to send me your comments, care of the CDA headquarters or directly at [president@cda-adc.ca](mailto:president@cda-adc.ca).

*John Diggins, B.Sc., DMD, MSD  
President of the Canadian Dental Association*