

President's Column

KEEPING YOUR PATIENTS INFORMED



Dr. Burton Conrod

There is a trend today in health care towards consumerism, as patients have access to more and more health information. The post-war generation enjoys considerably better oral health than its parents and is seeking even better physical, mental and social well-being for its own children. While the previous generation based many dental care decisions solely on cost and availability, our baby boomer patients are looking for convenience, better esthetics and exceptional service as well as painless and affordable treatment. Given these expectations, it is more important than ever that our patients consult credible and accurate sources of information.

A recent scan of Canadian media sources for one week reveals approximately 40 stories and interviews referencing dentistry or oral health. An Internet search for "porcelain veneers" will yield hundreds of Web pages, while searches for amalgam or fluoride will produce thousands of articles. Advertising of consumer products is yet another venue for the public to learn about oral health.

While many of these sources of information raise awareness about the importance of oral health and educate people on proper home care procedures, patients often do not question the credibility of some sources that would be dismissed as unethical pseudo-science or quackery by the profession.

CDA can play an important role in ensuring dentistry remains the leader in oral health care by providing both the public and the profession with credible information. Obvious public messaging vehicles include the CDA Web site, patient fact sheets such as those on amalgam and fluoride, our Dental Information System (DIS) brochures, media releases and Dental Health Month coverage. One less obvious resource is the CDA Seal of Recognition Program. In addition to verifying the accuracy of claims of efficacy made by manufacturers, the program reviews all advertising of recognized products to ensure it is not misleading.

You should also be aware that CDA is currently involved in the Canadian Health Network (CHN), a Web project funded by Health Canada to enable consumers to consult one Web site for reliable information on all aspects of health. CDA convened an expert panel to identify trustworthy resources for inclusion on the site. CHN's goal is to provide a balanced and diverse range of information to help the public draw conclusions about health issues after learning all the options. Hopefully, CDA will eventually become an affiliate partner of CHN which will enable us to review information from other organizations and recommend appropriate oral health links to its Web site.

Surveys show that dentists are Canadians' first choice when they are seeking insight into oral health issues. The high level of trust inherent in the dentist/patient relationship underscores dentists' responsibility to be aware of current issues and developments in oral health care and to translate this knowledge into lay terms in order to communicate it to patients.

Practitioners can gain insight into issues through CDA resources available to the public and through information provided only to the profession. CDA Resource Centre services, president's letters on specific topics such as dental unit waterlines, dentist fact sheets, and materials on the members' side of the Web site are easily accessible ways to remain current. A recent addition to our members' only side, "Dentistry in the News," makes it quick and easy to review recent Canadian media coverage of dental issues. National conferences such as the one in February on infection control or the upcoming one on evidence-based dentistry encourage interaction of dental professionals and provide important updates on oral health issues. Of course the *Journal* is another product that helps CDA contribute to a measurable improvement in oral health for Canadians, which is one of the key result areas targeted in our strategic plan.

CDA provides and maintains all these resources in order to advance the profession and help Canadians achieve optimal oral health. Our participation in the knowledge-based economy is achieved by gathering information and adding the insight that comes from a national perspective and the expertise available to a large organization. These activities will also ensure that CDA is the recognized leader in oral health in this country by maintaining our reputation as a provider of credible health care information.

Dentists must be vigilant in maintaining the trust of the public by taking the time to personally supply their patients with the information they need to make the right oral health care decisions. We can't simply always refer them to a Web site or dental team member, or next time we do a survey, we will find that Canadians are more apt to seek out one of these sources than to talk to their dentist.

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