

# Editorial

## LOOKING BACK TO SEE AHEAD



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

My December 2001 calendar offers a pithy phrase attributed to Sir Winston Churchill: "The farther backward you look, the farther forward you are likely to see." This statement reminds me of the insights of my predecessor, Dr. Ralph Crawford, when I was about to start with the Canadian Dental Association.

Dr. Crawford told me that if I wanted to understand the main issues facing the Association, I should look back at old editions of the *Journal* or consult the records of meetings of the Board of Governors. This wise dental historian also told me that the essentials of the debates of 50 and even 100 years ago are similar to those of today. Echoing Churchill's phrase, Dr. Crawford said that we need to know where we're coming from so we know where we're going, both as an association and as a profession.

CDA's 100th anniversary provides a wonderful opportunity to reflect on Canadian dentistry's impressive past achievements, while contemplating its challenging future. I believe that if we look closely at what motivated Canadian dentistry's 'Fathers of Confederation,' we see that the principles underpinning CDA's foundation will be pertinent for many years to come.

On September 16-18, 1902, about 20% of the dentists from across the Dominion of Canada converged on Montreal for CDA's inaugural meeting. Besides the clinical and scientific programs, a business meeting was held, attracting a group of far-sighted men who created CDA's first constitution, by-laws and code of ethics.

Their intentions were noble, but much of what they aimed to achieve did not come to pass for many years. Because legislation governing the licensing of dentists was in the provincial and territorial domain, standards required by this legislation differed from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The primary aim of CDA's founders was to set up a Dominion Dental Council that would grant dental licenses to graduates, allowing them to practice anywhere in the country.

Our founding fathers felt that if there were a single licensing body, the standards of proficiency of dentists would rise to the highest level. They believed that higher professional standards would benefit both the public and the profession.

Constitutional barriers never allowed the formation of a single national dental regulatory authority, although since the inaugural meeting, CDA has provided a forum that has allowed representatives from all jurisdictions to meet at regular intervals and reach decisions benefiting the dental profession and the public. Important steps on the road to national licensure

included the setting-up of the National Dental Examining Board in 1952, and the recent signing of the Agreement on Internal Trade, which allows general practice dentists to work in any jurisdiction in Canada. Dreams sometimes take a long time to realize but, if they are right in their intent, they will come true.

In this edition, we begin a series of 11 articles by Dr. Crawford, detailing the development of the Canadian dental profession, with a particular emphasis on the past century. This is just one of the ways we will celebrate CDA's first-century milestone. The highlight of the anniversary celebrations must be the Convention in Montreal in May, jointly organized with the Order of Dentists of Quebec. To keep abreast of CDA's centennial celebrations, consult the anniversary Web site at <http://100years.cda-adc.ca>.

Not content to examine the past, CDA asked this writer to deliver a presentation on *The Future of Dentistry* at the Montreal Convention and at forums across Canada in 2002. My sense in looking back at history, while factoring in current trends and possible future developments for our profession, is that CDA will be vital to the health of our profession as long as there is a Canada.

This organization provides a natural meeting place for all constituencies of Canadian dentistry to solve the national issues that confront us. It is also the most legitimate body for representing the Canadian dental profession to national and international organizations that are influencing the future of our profession. Successful advocacy depends on successful relationship-building, which is CDA's forte.

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