

Editorial

IT'S COOL TO BE CONNECTED



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Dentists are in close contact with many people every day, including staff members and patients. Yet many of us have little regular contact with professional colleagues, with whom we can share clinical insights or discuss the major issues facing our profession.

Historically, our professional associations have served as community-building organizations, hosting educational meetings and trade exhibitions. Professional publications such as *JCDA* also serve as glue, holding professional community together.

Yet that glue seems to be more diluted with each passing year. These days, more dentists are too busy to engage in collective professional activities. Yet colleagues who reflect on past successes of the profession realize that collective action and a sense of professional community are essential to its future flourishing.

Because of this awareness and because CDA is a member-focused organization, people like me are employed to find ways to build professional community among dentists.

I know that nothing can replace face-to-face interaction for the exchange of ideas; however, the Internet is hard to beat for the rapid dissemination of information to a large number of people. While a number of CDA's electronic offerings are designed with the public and professional colleagues in Canada and abroad in mind, our most important recent communications developments (e.g., *CDAAlert* and *Editors' Choice*) are conceived with our members' expressed needs in mind. Because we have set up mechanisms to continuously gather member feedback, we are confident that these initiatives will be useful and valued by members.

In May, we launched a new online discussion forum accessible through the members' section of the revamped CDA Web site (www.cda-adc.ca). Approved by the Communications and Membership Committee and the Board of Directors, this forum was pilot-tested in April by a small group of members from across Canada. Their useful feedback allowed us to improve the prototype before the forum's formal launch. They also communicated forcefully that the forum has a major potential to help CDA members exchange ideas and participate in our professional community.

So, if you are a CDA member, I invite you to log on to the members' section of the Web site. If you have forgotten your ID and password, there are clear instructions for accessing the members-only side of the site. The first time you enter the forum to register, you will see a screen that informs you of the regulations and etiquette for forum participation.

We have been warned that such discussion forums always descend to becoming pulpits for a minority of zealots with an axe to grind, who turn the silent majority away from such forums. Conscious of this risk, we are nonetheless confident in the professionalism of our members. I believe that this forum will be a wonderful tool for the mass exchange of information between members and for two-way communication between members and CDA, especially if it is used correctly.

The forum has 5 discussion areas: *Clinical Practice*, *Practice Management*, *Dental Politics*, *Marketplace* and *General Discussion*. While it is early days yet, members are already discussing a range of topics, such as laser dentistry, infection control, sectional matrix bands, privacy, consent forms and hospital dentistry. These discussions will become more interesting and valuable once we have a critical mass of members participating.

Two things particularly stick out in my mind about the pilot phase of developing the forum. One was the positive reaction of a member of the CDA Board of Directors when he realized that the *Marketplace* section of the forum could be used by members to seek an associate or sell an x-ray machine. With this section, we are essentially providing a free classified advertisement facility.

The second highlight was when I asked, in the *General Discussion* area, if any of the pilot participants could recommend a reasonably priced hotel in Paris. Next day, I received a positive recommendation, which included the hotel's Web site and the price of a night's accommodation. It's nice to have trusted colleagues prepared to share valuable information.

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