

Guest Editorial

DENTAL PRACTICE IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE



Dr. Burton Conrod

One of CDA's most important roles is to monitor and manage emerging issues in order to improve the environment in which its members operate. Our close relationship with the FDI World Dental Federation allows us to identify global issues in oral health that will impact the way Canadian dentists deliver care. FDI is the most efficient means for CDA to network with 158 national dental associations in 136 countries around the world. All member dentists of CDA help to make up the 750,000 members of FDI. Each time one of us is involved in an FDI activity, we take away valuable lessons that may be applied to our own settings. Whether it is changing infection control protocols in the face of a SARS epidemic, or the changing dynamics of association management, our friends at FDI have new ideas, energy and enthusiasm to offer.

Canadian dentistry certainly has much to offer to other associations in disadvantaged countries, where oral health is not even on the health care agenda. It is equally true, however, that Canadians can learn from colleagues in other parts of the world. Tobacco control is one area where we have learned much from exchanges with other associations. Valuable insight can also be gained in doing more with less — a concept well known in Canada's health care system. Promoting oral health on a shoestring budget is a fact in many countries, and programs enlisting the aid of community health workers and midwives show promise for adaptation in Canada's ethnic communities and remote areas, where language and lack of manpower can be barriers. Programs promoting affordable fluoride toothpaste and minimal restorative interventions might also raise the level of oral health in our remote regions.

Part of CDA's mission is to represent and advance the profession, both nationally and internationally. What better organization than CDA to convey Canadian dentistry's views to the World Dental Parliament? At the meeting of the Annual World Dental Congress in New Delhi this September, CDA's input will be sought on FDI statements on the quality of dental implants and diagnostic techniques for oral cancer, among others. FDI statements serve as important resources for dental associations and governments around the globe looking to institute new programs or policies.

CDA will also be encouraging the other members of the general assembly to adopt a new governance system to streamline FDI's processes and improve transparency and accountability. The proposal incorporates selection of council and committee

members based on competency rather than politics, and strengthens FDI's role in supporting national dental associations. Hopefully the new system will also make FDI a better leadership development opportunity for dental leaders worldwide. The recent Oral Health Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, stands as a good example of what effective leadership can achieve. At this FDI-initiated conference, government and dental officials from 48 African countries reached a milestone by agreeing to place oral health on the health care agenda.

CDA involvement in FDI provides unparalleled networking opportunities. At a single meeting, delegates discuss issues with leaders from world dental associations, dental specialties, academia, and research and industry organizations. FDI creates opportunities for dental associations to pool their resources and design better programs and policies than they could in isolation. FDI also provides a platform to engage institutions such as the International Standards Organization, the World Health Organization and the World Medical Association. In my experience, Canada has something to offer and something to gain from each of these interactions.

In today's global village, our patients are quite aware of health care issues and advances around the world, thanks in large part to the Internet. The FDI's newly redesigned Web site (www.fdiworldental.org) demonstrates how the best minds in the profession can work together to improve oral health. Canadian dentists owe it to their patients to contribute to the discussions that shape the future of our profession.

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