



Dr. Jack Cottrell

## Promoting Excellence in Our Profession

As an integral component of our accountability to members, CDA regularly performs surveys to ask dentists what they want and expect from their national association. First and foremost, you have told us that CDA should continue to advocate strongly on your behalf with the federal government.

A focal point of CDA's broad government relations strategy is the annual Days on the Hill event. This activity consists of a series of face-to-face meetings that solidifies the ongoing relationships and continued presence that the Association enjoys with government officials at the national level. Led by Dr. Phil Poon, the chair of CDA's government relations and public advocacy committee, and some very dedicated CDA staff, we were welcomed to Parliament Hill in the days leading up to the November confidence vote.

Despite the general mood of volatility and uncertainty that preceded the fall of the Liberal minority government, CDA was able to secure sessions with several high-ranking parliamentarians. Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan, Opposition Deputy Party leader Peter MacKay and Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh were just some of the influential political leaders who engaged in dialogue as we reinforced CDA's oral health messages.

This year's CDA contingent included Dr. David Mock, dean of the faculty of dentistry at the University of Toronto and chair of the deans' committee of the Association of Canadian Faculties of Dentistry. Although new to our lobbying team, Dr. Mock was a tremendous asset as he helped present CDA's recommendations on education, dental school funding and foreign-trained dentists.

Following the Days on the Hill, CDA hosted its fourth annual Academic Event. With a theme of ensuring a sustainable future for academic dentistry in Canada, this year's event was quite relevant and timely in light of the meetings that

took place days earlier on Parliament Hill. Some of the brightest minds in the dental academic community were brought together to examine ways to employ government programs and funding channels for the ultimate benefit of dental schools.

Provincial dental regulators, researchers, deans and other interested parties from across the country and internationally (including Dr. Kathleen Roth, president-elect of the American Dental Association) explored the different avenues that could be pursued to address the myriad of challenges facing our dental schools in Canada.

Some of the most pressing challenges include an urgent need for increased funding of the dental school clinics. The costs involved with maintaining a university clinic remain high with its demand for state-of-the-art equipment and technology, skilled teachers and scientists. Another significant challenge is the impact that high student debt loads are having on new dental graduates. Tuition fees for Canadian dental students remain the highest of any of the professional programs. Such accumulated debt upon graduation seems to be a factor discouraging new graduates from pursuing teaching or research careers.

With the refrain of 'No Professors, No Profession' fresh in their minds, dental faculties are having to explore career promotion opportunities and special financial support programs in an effort to attract a greater number of high-quality dental educators. The presentations at the Academic Event certainly sparked some very engaging and thoughtful group discussions throughout the day.

It became clear to me as I participated in both of these CDA initiatives that our profession has scores of intelligent individuals in leadership roles who are phenomenally committed to upholding the values that underpin our dental institutions. It is critical that we continue to promote and support the excellence that exists in this profession.

Ongoing discussions with the federal political leadership must continue as these dialogues allow us to advocate in a meaningful way for our dental faculties, to make their needs a greater priority in the eyes of the government. The profession itself must step up to significantly help out our own institutions if they are to survive. This is a chance for all of us to make a difference on an issue that matters not only to our dental fraternity but to our patients and our country.

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