

Dr. Wayne Halstrom: In Perfect Harmony

Dentists must wear several hats in the course of their day-to-day lives: health care professional, employer, counsellor, community leader and business owner, to name just a few. Such a variety of roles is indicative of how the modern dental practitioner must be able to adapt and adjust to the demands of the current practice environment.

CDA's new president, Dr. Wayne Halstrom of Lions Bay, British Columbia, knows what it means to wear many hats during a career. His impressive resumé is a testimony to the range of his talents — dentist, inventor, director, board member, managing partner, lead singer in a professional barbershop quartet. He is equally at ease in a white lab coat or a straw boater hat and red-striped jacket.

A History of Involvement

Dr. Halstrom graduated from the University of Alberta in 1960, returning to the west coast to set up a private practice in North Vancouver. He joined the Vancouver and District Dental Society shortly thereafter, which led to his initial forays into committee work with the College of Dental Surgeons of B.C., where he became chair of the College's third-party payment committee.

An extensive involvement in the development of third-party payment plans in dentistry shaped the next 20 years of Dr. Halstrom's career. In 1969, he accepted the role of director

of dental services with one of the largest non-profit health carriers in Canada, and was ultimately named chair of the board in 1990 and president in 1993.

A founding member of the B.C. Dental Association, he rose up the ranks of organized dentistry, being elected to its first Board of Directors in 1999 and finally named president in 2003. That same year, he served simultaneously as president of BCDA and vice-president of CDA.

However, Dr. Halstrom's involvement in dentistry did not follow one continuous path. During a 5-year hiatus that began in 1979, he pursued personal business interests, becoming a managing partner in several real estate ventures in the U.S. and Canada before re-establishing his dental practice and returning to his beloved profession.

He believes that this first-hand experience in the business world was invaluable to the progression of his career. "I returned to dentistry with some business exposure that few of my contemporaries had," he explains. "It's part of the mosaic of who I am and a part of what I will bring to the role of CDA president."

Dr. Halstrom feels it is crucial that dentists reconcile the fact that they have responsibilities as both health professionals and business owners. "It is paramount that we focus on how to maintain healthy and economically successful practices that can be called, without shame, businesses," he says. "At every level of dentistry we must learn to manage our affairs as custodians of the very large business and employer that we have become. If you don't run your business properly, then your professionalism is going to have trouble surviving."

The future health of the 'business' of dentistry is closely linked to the profession's successful control of the transmission of claims. Dr. Halstrom speaks confidently on the subject, drawing on his experience from both sides of this issue. "Dentistry must ensure its position within the e-claims world and avoid having carriers dictate our business practices or impose costs on the transmission of claims," he urges. "ITRANS is the way forward and the profession must see this initiative through to



Dr. Wayne Halstrom hugs his dog Chili before getting ready to tickle the ivories.



Dr. Halstrom enjoys a moment outdoors at his Lions Bay home.

its conclusion in order to maintain our professional independence.”

Collective Strength

Among the goals of his presidency, Dr. Halstrom wants to build upon the improved culture of communication that exists between CDA and its corporate and individual members. “We must work together to strengthen the relationships between all stakeholders. We need to put aside any regional differences and focus on making sure that we capitalize on the strengths that we have collectively,” he says. “I hope that one of the defining characteristics of my presidency is that we continue to move in a positive direction to make the most of our collective efforts while focusing on our accomplishments.”

When asked to identify other challenges that face Canadian dentistry, he notes the encroachment by the related professions on dentists’ traditional scope of practice. “Management of this issue remains a paramount concern, as governing bodies all over the land are subject to increasing pressures from special interest groups,” he explains. “How we position ourselves in the future will determine how successful the profession will remain.”

Dr. Halstrom is acutely aware that the lifeblood of any association lies in attracting and maintaining the interest of new members joining its ranks. He feels that now more than ever, newly graduating dentists require support from the profession. “We have to provide leadership to our budding business people. They are coming out of school with debt loads that most practitioners don’t appreciate or haven’t been exposed to,” he says. “We must increase our success in connecting with our new graduates, such as continuing to support CDA’s Practice Development Program at our universities. We must identify our young dentists’ needs, not our perception of their needs based on old attitudes, and proceed to help them achieve the success

that was a part of the dream that led them to a dental career in the first place.”

A Fiddler and a Singer

Dr. Halstrom was initially drawn to the dental profession by a lifelong fascination with performing tasks that demanded digital dexterity. “Even as a child I was a fiddler and a fixer,” he admits. “After my undergraduate degree, I chose dentistry as it seemed that a combination of working with my hands and a medical component would be satisfying. I felt this would serve both myself and my patients well over time.”

This tendency to fiddle might also account for Dr. Halstrom’s invention of an innovative oral appliance. As a lifelong snorer of legendary proportion, his nocturnal rumblings eventually began affecting his health and well-being (and that of his wife!).

Dr. Halstrom was exhibiting the signs and symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea, and after a series of single-car accidents, the last of which was nearly fatal, it became clear that action had to be taken.

“When I was offered the treatment of either a ventilator or surgery to correct the problem, I rejected both options and turned my attention to figuring out what else could be done,” he recalls. “I was excited about the possibilities of accomplishing treatment through a non-invasive, reversible technology and came up with the Halstrom Hinge precision attachment.” This alliterative moniker refers to the working element that enables a patient to wear a jaw advancement appliance with comfort and safety. The device is now being used by patients all over the world.

While this invention would form the legacy of most, Dr. Halstrom cites his singing career as particularly memorable. He joined the “Model T Four” barbershop quartet as lead singer in 1961. The group was already accomplished in their hobby, but ventured into the commercial music business after he joined and continued well into the 90s. “We performed on the CBC and CTV television networks, enjoying appearances on *The Beachcombers* as well as a series called *Banjo Parlor*,” he remembers. “We sang in a number of radio commercials for clients from coast to coast in Canada. But the most fun I had with this group had to be the recording of our album where, although unorthodox for an a cappella group, we were accompanied by a full orchestra,” enthuses Dr. Halstrom.

Dr. Halstrom reveals that the true loves in his life are his wife, his children, his dog and the Pacific Ocean. “Arlene and I spend as much time as we can with our 7 children and 22 grandchildren.” It seems that dedicated husband, father and grandfather are yet other hats that Dr. Halstrom wears with unmistakable panache. ✦