



Dr. Wayne Halstrom

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## The Future Is Now

Last month I wrote about the need for CDA members to participate in the affairs of the Association. I want to take this opportunity to thank both the CDA members and potential members who participated in the 2006 Membership Survey. These colleagues provided their honest opinions on the health and well-being of the dental profession in Canada. Such first-hand information will be of inestimable value to CDA in planning for the future.

Preliminary survey results have been compiled and include answers from dentists in almost every area of Canada. As a courtesy to the Order of Dentists of Quebec, who were distributing their own survey at the same time, CDA agreed to delay the Membership Survey in Quebec until January 2007. In general, the response rate was very encouraging and the answers provided will help keep CDA current, relevant and valuable to its membership.

Similar surveys were conducted in 2002 and 2004, thus allowing an opportunity to compare changing attitudes within the profession. Previous surveys seemed to indicate a shift from an appreciation for the intangible value of membership to a demand for more tangible member benefits. This most recent survey revealed a bit of a reversal of this trend, with growing support for the high level, sometimes harder to appreciate, efforts of the Association.

When asked to rate the relative importance of 5 general areas of programs and services offered by CDA, Government Relations and Public Education were named as the 2 leading areas. Other noteworthy results show that on a scale of 0 to 10, dentists ranked the importance of having a national dental association at 8.2. Similarly, over 90% agreed that CDA provides a strong national voice for dentistry.

Perhaps the most revealing information gathered from this survey was the identification

of the growth in the electronic communication usage and capabilities of our membership. There was a near dead heat between members wishing to receive communications from CDA by email versus direct mail. Over 90% of dental offices in Canada have personal computers at their reception desks, with 84% of these offices having high-speed Internet service.

These data are reassuring to CDA because many decisions taken over the past few years have lead us down the path of electronic services and communications. For instance, CDA recently introduced Lexi-Comp Online and the electronic Table of Contents (eTOC) service. The Lexi-Comp online drug databases give members access to a vast array of pharmaceutical information essential to the modern dental practice. The eTOC service offers electronic versions of the table of contents of over 250 journals, providing instant access to customized clinical and practice management information.

Without doubt, the electronic-based service that has received the most attention is ITRANS. Despite some confusion about its role in relation to CDAnet, I am pleased to report that over 2 million claims will be transmitted this year via ITRANS, representing 10% of all dental benefit claims projected for 2007. While the ITRANS project has been criticized for being ahead of its time, I would like to draw your attention to the changing landscape of health service provision in this country.

In Canada, we are seeing a concerted effort toward the implementation of the Electronic Health Record (EHR), the parameters of which will govern our practice management efforts of the future. In a document entitled *Beyond Good Intentions: Accelerating the Electronic Health Record in Canada*, Canada Health Infoway and the Health Council of Canada confirm their mandate to provide a fully interoperable EHR for 50% of Canadians by 2009 and the entire population in 2010. Provincial developments on this front include the former premier of Alberta promising an EHR for every Albertan by 2008 while Newfoundland and Labrador anticipates a fully functional province-wide EHR by 2009.

The Canadian dental profession is well positioned to handle this continuing electronic trend, because the future is now!

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