



Dr. Darryl Smith

The Changing Face of Dental Education

Put a group of Canadian dentists in a room and invariably the discussion will turn to the issues facing dental education in Canada. The perspectives will vary depending on the audience and experience, but the common theme is how integral dental faculties are to the future of our profession. However, we often do not understand the pressures or see the changes our faculties must deal with.

Meetings such as the Canadian Dental Regulatory Federation's "Access to Care: The Rural Dentist," held in St. John's, Newfoundland, in October 2007, have brought insights to the role dental faculties can play in addressing access to care issues. Some solutions, such as changing the current dental admission process or creating new programs that will fill in the education gaps of foreign-trained specialists, can also create new challenges for dental faculties, as they are restricted in how much they can change based on their university's governing policies.

The academic community is the foundation on which our education system is built. For most of us, our first real introduction to the profession is through the dedicated individuals we encounter in our undergraduate training. Most of us quickly understand the dynamics of a dental office soon after graduation because of the background and skill set these mentors provide. Academics work in a complicated environment where they are expected to be role models, clinicians, educators, researchers and administrators. They bring a different perspective to the profession that needs to be shared with the larger community. CDA relies on our academic community for expert contribution to JCDA and to speak for the profession. Embedding them in the collective decision-making process at CDA is a priority. Academics are now represented by a voting member at CDA's annual general meet-

ings, but their involvement must extend further into CDA's committees and working groups.

Two examples of changing dental education systems were in evidence at the 2007 FDI Annual World Dental Congress in Dubai. During a visit to the University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, we were shown what one might call "instant knowledge transfer" in action. Within weeks of being presented to students at the University of Adelaide, Australia, the entire dental faculty's curriculum, right down to the lecturers' notes, is transferred electronically and via print to students at Sharjah, where it is modified as necessary. It should be noted that many educators at the University of Sharjah obtained their dental education and postgraduate training in Canada, the United States and Britain. In a further Canadian connection, Dr. Johann Devries, former dean of the faculty of dentistry at the University of Manitoba, is spearheading this project as current dean of the faculty of dentistry at the University of Adelaide.

The second eye-opener occurred when I met Dr. Yousef Fouad Talic, president of the Saudi Dental Society, who obtained his postgraduate training in the United States and is now using his knowledge to improve health in the Middle East. My group was taken to a private reception to discuss Dubai Health Care City, a massive development, even by Dubai standards, dedicated to the promotion of health, research, treatment and education. Most notable are the health institutes spanning all areas of health, including dentistry, which provide both treatment and postgraduate training. These institutes partner with major universities in the United States and Europe to deliver care in state-of-the-art centres with leading-edge technology and clinicians.

I sometimes think that we take our Canadian degrees for granted. However, much of the rest of the world recognizes the high quality of a Canadian education, the value of that training and the doors it can open. In today's virtual community, education is one of the most highly valued commodities Canada can provide. It is up to us to be innovative and find ways to share with the rest of the world the values and standards taught to us by our academic colleagues.

Related Resources

See list of related resources on the eJCDA website at www.cda-adc.ca/jcda/vol-74/issue-1/11.html.

Darryl Smith, BSc, DDS
president@cda-adc.ca

“Much of the rest of the world recognizes the high quality of a Canadian education and the doors it can open.”