



Dr. Darryl Smith

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A New Model for Organized Dentistry

As I write my last column as president of the Canadian Dental Association, I'm reflecting on all the things I've heard from members as I travelled across the country in this role. One of the things I've learned during my term is that organized dentistry must spend less time dealing with process and get on with delivering its messages and services.

The profession is currently facing challenges and opportunities. We live in a country of remarkable diversity from region to region, but all regions must deal with the same oral health care issues. As I've mentioned in previous columns, the issue of access to care has, and will continue to have, the most far-reaching effects on the delivery of oral and other health services across Canada.

Dealing with the profession's issues has traditionally fallen to our associations and regulatory bodies. Organized dentistry has accomplished great things. However, the label is somewhat of an oxymoron, in that it implies we are crystal clear about the roles, responsibilities and relationships that exist between the various groups working on behalf of the profession. Organized dentistry cannot operate as individual cells and at cross-purposes. Collectively, we need to know where we are going and look at the big picture. This means deciding who is most suited to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved.

CDA and its corporate members have been working toward a renewed partnership with the aim of better serving the profession. The first hurdle is in understanding and accepting that the health care system in Canada has room for the profession to get involved provincially and nationally in the development of policy and delivery of care. For dentistry not to be involved at both these levels would be a disservice to our members and the public.

What I've been hearing from Canadian dentists is that we need strong complementary provincial and national associations representing dentistry that are able to communicate effectively, have defined roles and responsibilities without duplication, share membership, and have the necessary financial resources to do the jobs they are tasked with. It does mean changing the current culture and doing things differently.

As a result of listening to these needs, CDA's Board has begun the process of developing a framework for CDA and its corporate members to create a structure aimed at maximizing value and effectiveness, playing to each association's strengths. The highlights of this new framework model include moving to co-branding membership benefits and programs, and delivering them through the provincial dental associations. In addition, the framework includes a communication strategy to deal with emerging issues, to clearly explain the ongoing activities of CDA to its corporate members and to support the provincial dental associations in delivering key messages.

CDA and the provincial dental associations will establish a list of all their existing programs and services to foster a community of sharing. CDA will also endeavour to be a consensus building and facilitating body to help create solutions to issues facing dentistry as a whole and those specific to the provincial dental associations. The committee structure within CDA as it relates to the provincial dental associations will be aligned as much as possible in terms of both purpose and membership. CDA's advocacy role on behalf of the profession at the federal level will take on a sharper and more prominent focus.

To achieve these changes, a new membership model with organizations connected for the common good, rather than in competition for money, membership and value, must be a priority. Using our collective energies to the best advantage will ensure we find solutions to the issues we face. Regardless of where this new path takes us, the values of humanity and service must be what define dentistry, now and in the future.

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