



Dr. Don Friedlander

“Global knowledge exchange is an essential element of CDA’s ongoing participation within FDI.”

The Butterfly Effect and Dentistry

In 1972, meteorologist Edward Lorenz delivered a speech with the provocative title “Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?” His ideas would become popularly known as the “butterfly effect,” the concept that the flap of a butterfly’s wings would be enough to alter the course of the weather forever. In dentistry (as well as the weather), geographically remote and seemingly unrelated events can eventually have a profound effect on the dental profession in Canada.

This phenomenon came to mind recently as I attended the FDI World Dental Congress in Singapore as a member of CDA’s official delegation. Participating at this event reaffirmed for me the importance of staying globally connected — aware of where the butterflies are, so to speak. While in the past we may have been advised to think locally and act globally, now we must also think globally and act locally. By this I mean that CDA needs to look beyond our borders, to observe developments in dentistry in other countries and determine how these trends and events will affect the professional lives of Canadian dentists.

Canada is one of over 190 member associations from 134 countries in FDI, which represents more than 1 million dentists worldwide. FDI’s vision is to lead the world toward optimal oral health by advancing and promoting the practice of dentistry through the transfer of knowledge. It strikes me that its vision parallels CDA’s new strategic direction, which focuses on knowledge and advocacy. As the respective international and national leaders of dentistry, FDI and CDA are examining similar issues.

A good example of this synergy is the Global Caries Initiative, a series of regional conferences organized by FDI to help understand the issues and promote prevention and oral health

as a component of overall health, with the ultimate goal of eradicating caries in children under 3 years of age. This project views caries as a public health issue and searches for practical ways to improve techniques for early identification and intervention in the disease process.

Canadian dentistry is also aware of the seriousness of early childhood caries (ECC) and, having scanned the global environment, has taken complementary action. In this month’s Editorial (p. 557), Dr. O’Keefe discusses the recent activities of the Canadian Academy of Pediatric Dentistry in this area. As well, CDA’s Committee of Clinical and Scientific Affairs has created an ECC task force to review the situation in Canada and make recommendations on how to advocate on this issue (p. 561). So, not only can we serve as a resource to FDI on ECC, we can also learn from FDI’s efforts and successes around the world and apply this knowledge to Canada.

Whether the issue is caries, amalgam or fluoride, knowledge exchange truly flows in both directions. In fact, there is a high respect within FDI for Canada’s contributions to the global dental profession. Dr. Burton Conrod of Sydney, Nova Scotia, has just completed his term as FDI president and he made public health a priority issue for the organization. Dr. Conrod’s legacy will be carried on as other Canadians hold positions of importance on several FDI committees and CDA’s contributions to FDI position statements continue to be valued.

Global knowledge exchange is an essential element of CDA’s ongoing participation within FDI. With this in mind, we held formal meetings with representatives from many national dental associations in Singapore to exchange ideas, discuss challenges and identify solutions to common issues. Such open lines of communication are critical to our capacity to properly scan the global professional environment and effectively serve our members.

The world of the 21st century is rapidly shrinking, and the “butterfly effect” will surely touch dentistry in many areas. CDA must continue to play an active role globally through our participation at FDI to help our members manage a changing profession locally. Our commitment to global public health should remain a priority, so that we can also deliver on our promise of optimal oral health at home.

Don A. Friedlander, BSc, DDS
president@cda-adc.ca