

President's Column

SEPTEMBER 11 AND THE FUTURE OF DENTISTRY



Dr. George Sweetnam

The American Dental Association has published a 180-page report on the future of dentistry to assist them in their strategic planning. As I sit studying the report, a radio commentator in the background is reviewing the effects of September 11. I cannot help but wonder what the effects of that fateful day will be on the dental profession.

You may already be aware of the more immediate outcomes. CDA sent a letter to the ADA offering our condolences and any assistance in manpower and forensic dentistry expertise that we could provide. This support has been gratefully acknowledged. It is much appreciated and strengthens an already good relationship.

CDA's business was also affected. Restrictions in air travel caused the cancellation of the September board of governors meeting. Amid administrative headaches, it was rescheduled to November 16 and 17.

In light of security issues, the wisdom of traveling by air to the FDI world dental congress was debated, but CDA delegates did attend. Only the ADA's delegation withdrew, and its absence was felt at the meeting. Shortly after returning from FDI, flying to attend the ADA's annual session in Kansas City also caused concern to the CDA delegation.

In short, getting there is no longer "half the fun" and as a result, there is likely to be a rapid deployment of video conferencing technology in many organizations in the months and years to come. CDA will be examining this alternative to face-to-face meetings, which would probably replace the need for some air travel.

I am sure most dentists are re-examining their vacation plans. Similarly, I trust many dentists are keeping a watchful eye on their investments. In spite of the optimism of stockbrokers, markets had for the past several months taken a turn for the worse with what seems to be a long-term correction in the value of equities. The events of September 11 have exacerbated this state of affairs, particularly in the airline industry. The economic situation has affected not only our financial position as dentists, but also that of our patients. We are seeing an increase in layoffs among patients attending our practices with a consequent loss of dental benefits.

The deployment of our military forces internationally has an effect, which might not be immediately apparent to dentistry. The Department of National Defense has to fund this mission as an unexpected budget item and this means the Department of Finance must comb through existing budgets for funds.

CDA is making a presentation before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance this fall as part of the committee's pre-

budget consultations. It seems unlikely that dental programs, such as the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program, will be expanded at a time when the public places security ahead of health in its priorities for spending. Accordingly, CDA's government relations strategies should reflect the savings and efficiencies that can be achieved. To this end, we are continuing to push for a reduction in the bureaucracy of the NIHB program which, if achieved, could reduce the administration and transportation budgets.

Prevention is the most obvious means of achieving health care savings and dentistry is at the forefront of prevention in the health care sector. The extent for overall health care savings afforded by prevention is substantial, especially if there is a growth in programs in which the individual must assume responsibility for a healthy lifestyle or bear some financial consequences. We already know this is the basis of a good dental plan.

In every trial there can be a triumph. In this climate of fear, generated by terrorist acts intended to break the bond of our social fabric, our automatic response might be to think divisively because of a heightened awareness of the ethnic backgrounds and cultural diversity of our neighbours. We cannot allow terrorism to make us draw these distinctions. We must ask ourselves, "What can I, as a dentist, do to improve the future?" Dentists can contribute positively by doing something as simple as reaching out and helping an immigrant, through our dental skills or simply as good neighbours. Care, understanding and compassion toward a new Canadian can set the framework for their perspective of a new world — a Canada worth defending.

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