

President's Column

WE'RE RESPONDING TO YOUR CONCERNS



Dr. Tom Breneman

The 4 weekends from May 24 until June 15 were a very busy time for organized dentistry in Canada: 8 of our 10 provincial associations held their annual meetings and the joint Canadian Dental Association and Alberta Dental Association & College (ADA&C) annual congress took place in Jasper, Alberta.

The 2003 Jasper Dental Congress was a huge success, with an increase in attendance over previous ADA&C conferences of more than 85%. (Plan now to attend the 2004 Pacific Dental Conference, cohosted by CDA and the Association of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia; it will be held March 4–5 at the Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre.)

All the provincial annual meetings were attended by at least one member of your CDA management team. The intent of this representation was to update our members on the activities and issues in which CDA is currently involved, and to learn more about the

regional concerns of our membership. Past experience has taught us that local issues often become national ones, and sometimes in a hurry.

There was a common theme throughout these annual meetings, having to do with current and anticipated dental manpower shortages. The current shortage revolves around dental hygienists and the difficulty many practitioners have in finding enough hygienists to provide the preventive care requirements for their practices.

Adding to this frustration is the stated intention of our university-based programs and hygiene licensing bodies to add a baccalaureate degree to graduation and licensing requirements. This extra year of education with no additional clinical component will add to our shortages, at least for the near term.

Economics 101 and the theory of supply and demand suggest that alternate sources of training will be developed as the need for adequately trained personnel increases. Will the advent of new alternate sources of supply eventually place our university hygiene programs at risk, as governments and universities continually monitor and re-evaluate the need for these expenditures?

The second area of concern is the current and future supply of dentists. Government statistics indicate that, by 2011, all professional groups (including dentistry) will be in a manpower shortage situation. We are all aware that in certain areas of our country (both urban and rural), there are many unfilled openings for associates, practices for sale and opportunities to establish successful practices.

The solution to this shortage is multifactorial. We need to continue to address the issues identified at the Dental Academic Summit to ensure the ongoing vitality of our dental

schools. The issues are selection to ensure success in practice, and selection for diversity, so that graduates are interested in all areas of practice, not just fee-for-service. CDA is now organizing a follow-up Dental Admissions Conference, to be held this October. The conference will look at ways to ensure that applicants to our schools are well suited to meet the demands of our profession upon graduation.

Currently, we have a reciprocal accreditation agreement with schools in the United States, whereby graduates from an accredited school can — if they successfully complete the National Dental Examining Board of Canada (NDEB) exams within 7 years of graduation — apply for a licence to practise in Canada. Graduates from non-accredited schools, though, need to successfully complete a qualifying or degree completion program to be able to write the NDEB exams and apply for licensure in Canada. Regrettably, there are not enough positions in these programs to meet our future needs.

This September, Citizenship and Immigration Minister Denis Coderre will address CDA's first-ever meeting of its General Assembly (under our new governance system). Minister Coderre will discuss changes to the certification of foreign-trained professionals.

The need for hard data on manpower issues is obvious and CDA — together with Human Resources Development Canada and allied dental groups — is well along in a study to produce future needs projections in the delivery of oral health care.

So, the concerns of our members are being listened to and acted upon. Thanks to all for the fabulous hospitality at the meetings and for the opportunity to map the future of our profession.

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