

Editorial

COMING IN FROM THE COLD



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

I'm sure some of you watched the historic outdoor hockey games that took place in Edmonton in late November. In freezing temperatures that plummeted to -23° C, some 56,000 brave souls sat through 2 hockey games played in the Commonwealth Stadium.

That same weekend in Edmonton, indoors thankfully, I attended a 2-day symposium organized by the University of Alberta to celebrate its 85th anniversary. In those 85 years, the dental school has gone from being part of the medical faculty to being a separate faculty; now it's part of the new faculty of medicine and dentistry.

While the dental school seemed in danger of being closed within the past decade, the profession in Alberta rallied to the cause and was very influential in turning around the fate of the school. Such is the

commitment of the profession to support dental education that each dentist registered in Alberta pays a part of his or her licence fee each year towards endowments to support the dental school.

At an anniversary dinner, the dean of the faculty of medicine and dentistry, Dr. Lorne Tyrrell, assured the audience that the future of the Alberta dental school is in good hands. (Dr. Tyrrell is stepping down at the end of this academic year.) He noted that one of the criteria for selecting the next dean of the faculty will be a commitment to keep dental education alive and thriving at the university. Our profession owes much to Dr. Tyrrell for his commitment to the continued development of dental education in Alberta.

There is much to be hopeful for at that dental school, despite the problems faced by all such institutions. The subhead for the symposium was *Facing the future with confidence*; this confidence is fully justified, on the strength of the talents of the young faculty members who made presentations at the symposium.

I was also impressed by Dr. John Woronuk of Edmonton, one of my favourite characters in Canadian dentistry, who continues to amaze me. The first time I met him, about 5 years ago, he reminded me of a spring lamb at a time in his career when most would have been considering retirement. Dr. Woronuk delighted in showing me how he was designing a new type of silent high-speed turbine and that he was dusting off his high-school calculus to calculate the angles of the fins of the turbine. He also took great pride in showing me the telehealth facilities at the dental school, where faculty members could provide consultation services to colleagues in rural areas.

On my most recent visit, Dr. Woronuk and his colleague Yvonne Pinchbeck took me to visit the University of Alberta Satellite Outreach Clinics in northern Alberta, where dental and dental hygiene students spend time providing care to patients in underserved communities. I believe the university can be very proud of the excellent learning opportunity that these clinics provide for their students and the quality of care received by the residents of these northern communities. The patients I met at those clinics told me they were very happy with the service they received.

I was particularly struck by the fact that a new community hospital is being built in the town of High Level and that the dental outreach clinic will be prominently located just inside the main entrance, in a very high-traffic part of the building. This is in stark contrast to the current clinic in a prefab building, which has seen better days, on the grounds of the community hospital. The dental clinic can truly be said to be coming in from the cold by being fully integrated with medical and other services in the hospital.

On this visit to Edmonton, I felt I was getting a glimpse of the future of dental education: a dental school that is integrated with the medical school, staffed by vibrant and talented young faculty members, where students are getting at least part of their education out in the community. With proper vision and support, they could create a "dental school without walls" in Alberta. Such an operation could serve the profession and the public very well indeed!

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