

Dr. Don Friedlander: Forging a New Path at CDA

The sport of mountaineering emphasizes the importance of knowing the mountain, having a strategy for climbing it and committing to the summit. It requires great individual effort, but also coordinated teamwork. The lessons learned from mountaineering continue to play a role in the career of CDA's new president, Dr. Don Friedlander.

A native of Montreal, Dr. Friedlander was initially drawn to dentistry while working on his undergraduate degree at McGill University. "I was a laboratory assistant for a biochemistry course for dental students at McGill, and this gave me a chance to talk with dental students about their course of study and career aspirations," he recalls. He went on to earn his DDS from McGill in 1979, and after a local residency placement, Dr. Friedlander moved to Ottawa in 1980. He has practised dentistry in the nation's capital since that time.

Dr. Friedlander credits the influence of people close to him for prompting him to originally become involved with his professional associations. "My first practice partner, Ed Abrahams, had a real passion for the profession and his attitude was infectious," remembers Dr. Friedlander. "He insisted, right from the start, that I join the local, provincial and national associations."

Giving Back to the Profession

Yet Dr. Friedlander also realized that it was not simply membership in these organizations that was important, but rather that dentists have the same obligations as the citizens of any community — namely to give back in some capacity.

This understanding led to his initial involvement on the executive of the Ottawa Dental Society, one of the more active component societies of the Ontario Dental Association (ODA).

"From my involvement with this local group, there evolved a natural progression for me to contribute to the wider dental community, first provincially and then nationally," he says.

After his term as president of the Ottawa Dental Society in 1992–93, Dr. Friedlander went on to serve with the ODA Board of Governors, then the ODA Board of Directors, eventually becoming ODA president in 1999–2000.

Dr. Friedlander moved to the national level shortly after his term as ODA president, performing duties with CDA's Council on Education and the Tripartite Task Force. "I appreciated participating on the Council as I've had an active and longstanding interest in dental education," he notes. "However, I feel especially privileged to have contributed to the work of the Tripartite Task Force, as I believe the task force's recommendations continue to have profound, positive, far-reaching effects on CDA."

New Membership and Governance Model at CDA

Indeed, as co-chair of CDA's Membership Working Group, Dr. Friedlander has been involved with proposing a new membership and governance model for CDA which, if accepted, will enact the last of the Tripartite Task Force's recommendations. Under this new model, CDA will now primarily serve the corporate members, namely the provincial dental associations, rather than directly serving the individual dentist. "In order to be successful, this new model will require a shift in how we do business along with a truly collaborative partnership with our corporate members," he stresses.

Dr. Friedlander is looking to this new partnership as a means for CDA to better focus on its purpose under its new strategic priorities, and to support the corporate members as they deliver the best services to the dentists of Canada. "We need to engage the provinces more, to increase their involvement and influence on national decisions that affect all dentists in Canada," he believes.

He anticipates that managing this significant transition from an individual member





Dr. Don Friedlander takes a break during one of his long-distance cycling excursions.

model to a corporate member model will command much of the efforts of the CDA Board of Directors in the coming months.

Knowledge and Advocacy

Another issue that will require significant effort is reinforcing CDA's brand. Dr. Friedlander would like CDA to be increasingly recognized for providing superior knowledge and advocacy services. "Establishing these two areas as CDA hallmarks will involve improving our capacity to collect relevant knowledge for our members and to process and distribute this information wisely," he says.

"CDA also needs to continually anticipate what political and scientific issues lie just over the horizon and then be able to share this knowledge with our partners," continues Dr. Friedlander. The Association has facilitated workshops recently to collect this community wisdom and vision of the future. Next the Board will be exploring how best to position the profession to adapt to impending changes and take advantage of possible opportunities.

Dr. Friedlander is also conscious of the fact that organized dentistry must continually make an effort to engage with the many groups of practitioners that exist within the larger dental community, namely specialists, students and those involved in research and academia.

"Far too often, groups within the dental community accomplish their work and generate new ideas in isolation," he says. "At the very least, there is a duplication of work, but worse, we may end up

working at cross-purposes." He feels that CDA's evolving relationship with the corporate members must include finding the best methods of engaging these special interest groups.

Mentoring Relationships Provide Guidance

Dr. Friedlander is thankful for the mentoring relationships that have helped shape his own career. "I had great role models early in my career as a dentist, and for that I am grateful," he notes. "My progression in organized dentistry has always been as a result of mentoring and forging new personal relationships."

"At each step of my evolution, there was someone who encouraged and mentored me to participate at another level, whether it was to contribute to the Tripartite Task Force or to run for the CDA Board of Directors. These were people that I respected and admired, and I am very appreciative that they took an interest in me," he adds. Dr. Friedlander believes such mentor and protégé relationships need to be encouraged by organized dentistry to ensure the future success of the profession.

Setting a New Challenge

Dr. Friedlander spends much of his free time with his wife and two daughters enjoying outdoor physical activities. Some of his athletic passions include cycling, skate skiing and the aforementioned mountaineering. He has cycled from coast to coast and border to border across Canada on several occasions. And his experiences with mountaineering have given him the opportunity to climb peaks in the Yukon, Rockies, Andes, Pyrenees and Himalayas.

"I very much enjoy the feeling of having prepared well for an expedition, whether it's cycling to the other side of the continent or climbing to the summit of a mountain, focusing on the objective and then maximizing my efforts to make it happen," he explains.

Dr. Friedlander hopes to climb some new mountains with CDA, as the Association explores new ways to brand itself, engage its partners and serve its members. "The way forward involves a committed partnership of associations focusing and acting collaboratively to serve the needs of Canadian dentists," he concludes. "We know where we want to go, we have a strategy and the capacity to get there, and we're committed to success." ♦

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