

President's Column

GET ACTIVE IN CDA AND FEEL THE BENEFITS



Dr. George Sweetnam

It starts as an interest or a concern, which becomes an opportunity and an action, leading to involvement and another interest or concern. There you have the cycle that engages the hard-working volunteers who make up CDA.

Practising dentists across Canada — whether members or non-members of CDA — owe a great deal to these members who labour so diligently for our common good.

CDA volunteers are often called upon to sort through complex bylaws and fee codes, plan public education, coordinate government relations initiatives, research consumer products, study dental materials, and examine issues of community and institutional dentistry.

Yet not all CDA members see the value of the work being done on their behalf. This was brought home to me at the recent Pacific Dental Conference in Vancouver. At the CDA booth, several member-dentists told me they couldn't see the benefit they

were getting for their membership dollars.

Well, if they use CDAnet, they are saving two-and-a-half times the cost of their membership fee. Still, if members aren't aware of the advantages of being a part of CDA, then we have a problem that we must come to grips with.

CDA recently held focus groups across Canada to tackle this concern. It should come as no surprise that an individual member's support for CDA is directly proportional to his/her involvement in Association activities. Involvement enlarges one's perception of the need for CDA and exposes the individual member-dentist to the true extent of the benefits CDA provides.

Chatting with new Canadian dentists, I was surprised to find out that many of them do not understand Canada's federal and provincial government system. Their lack of familiarity with how Confederation works makes it difficult for them to see the need for provincial *and* national advocacy.

Another challenge is that some CDA members can't be reached through the printed word. So, how do we reach those members who don't read CDA publications? I urge these members to make the effort to read at least a few pages every month of the publications produced by CDA. Still, the challenge remains: Through what media can we establish better communications with our members so they have a clearer idea of what CDA is doing for them?

How do we convince dentists to become more active in CDA? Front-line, grassroots, wet-fingered dentists might feel like they lacked the expertise to be full-fledged CDA committee members. Not correct. Their perception of the issues relevant to their style of practice *is* their expertise, while expertise on a committee is gradually

acquired through preparation, debate and discussion. Add a bit of common sense and an ability to identify and prioritize issues from a national viewpoint and — *voilà!* — you have excellent committee members.

CDA's New Dentist Program is a good source of committee volunteers. Upon graduating, student leaders are encouraged to accept committee appointments as New Dentist Members for a one-year term. Many of these young dentists go on to become regular committee members and add their unique perspective.

Traditional committee roles will change soon with the restructuring of CDA's governance. Project-specific task forces and short-term, goal-oriented working groups will aim at increasing productivity, while demanding less time from volunteers.

I cannot end this column on involvement without mentioning the tangible rewards of being a working member of CDA. Working shoulder to shoulder with highly motivated colleagues is uplifting. Knowledge is gained by exchanging information with leading authorities. Close bonds of friendship are made nationwide. There occurs a gradual, healthy reality check. You acquire an awareness of our 'culture' and how our profession fits into the big picture.

So, if you are interested in dental matters — as I'm sure most of you are — the opportunity beckons to participate in CDA affairs. I urge you to seize the opportunity to work with our high-caliber volunteers! Much important work still needs to be done.

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