

President's Column

A POTPOURRI OF CONCERNS



Dr. George Sweetnam

I have just finished the most intense period of my presidency, attending the CDA/Journées dentaires internationales du Québec joint convention and many of the spring meetings of the provincial dental associations.

Leadership in CDA involves a steep learning curve that is logarithmic. With each visit to a provincial association, you meet the movers and shakers of the day and learn the political nuances of their organizations. Names take on faces and faces have personalities and personalities become respected friends.

One is soon struck by the similarity of problems faced by dentists across Canada and yet also aware of the regionally diverse nature of the possible solutions.

Example — the chronic shortage of dental hygienists and the various plans to alleviate this shortage. First, the role of the hygienist comes under provincial health regulations, which vary from province to province. In considering a national overview, one first has to distill the similarities in these regulations. There are differences in autonomy and scopes of prac-

tice. Complicating the picture is the movement by the hygienists' leadership to promote a baccalaureate degree as qualification. Dentists view this as a counterproductive measure that would do nothing to alleviate the hygienists' shortage.

While respectful of the wishes of hygienists to advance their level of education, the need for it is not evident. Present-day training is seen as adequate for the dental office setting. Building new training facilities for dental hygienists and developing expanded-duty modules for dental assistants to allow scaling are suggested regional solutions.

To reach a national consensus, CDA's Executive Council decided on a round-table discussion format for the September Board of Governors meeting. This will facilitate the sharing of inter-provincial concerns and solutions.

On another matter, a leap of faith will be required to approve the bylaw revisions that are being drafted in accordance with the Board of Governors' instructions. Opinions on the new governance model range from approval to concern. Some members are reassured that a variation of the American Society of Association Executives' template is functioning well in Ontario, while others are concerned that smaller provinces will be unheeded if a CDA variation of the template is adopted nationally.

The work of the Association's Steering Committee on Governance Review must be respected, as its members have carefully assessed various organizational models and have an excellent sense of the direction in which CDA should be heading.

The difficulty is in the politics. I am reminded of the oft-heard phrase of a dying organization: "This isn't how we always did it." Glen Tecker, a leading expert in association manage-

ment, reminds us that people must be brought along at a rate they are comfortable with. If they start to get confused, they will retreat to that comfort zone. The necessity for change is obvious. We must decide on the proper speed with which we will bring about this change.

Regional representation on the proposed Board of Directors will remain, but it will be superseded by the primacy of competency as an electoral qualification. Regional representation and accountability will be the duty of all. (No puppets!)

Corporate membership is another concern. Although it was a parallel issue to the governance review, corporate membership was seen as closely linked by some. The original intent was to bring non-members in the voluntary provinces of Ontario and Quebec on board CDA by a process of joint membership with the provincial association. Ontario has not accepted this process, but has underlined its continuing strong support for CDA, so it's back to the drawing board as far as corporate membership is concerned. The Executive Council has struck a Task Force on Membership Equity to explore alternatives.

Finally, I am very excited about the development of ITrans, a superior replacement for CDAnet. A pilot study is now underway that is attracting the interest of our neighbours to the south. ITrans promises state-of-the-art data transmission, including X-rays and the dissemination of point-of-care information (such as drug interactions) to you at chairside.

We are being told that leading associations of the future will have information as their primary member service and be a first-stop site for members.

We are on our way to that future!

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