

President's Column

THE FUTURE IS NOW



Dr. George Sweetnam

Many of you have heard *JCDA* editor-in-chief Dr. John O'Keefe's presentation *The Future of Dentistry*. If you haven't, I urge you to do so. Dr. O'Keefe describes 4 possible future scenarios, ranging from one where dentists still have control over their destiny, to another where they abdicate that control to corporate interests. All of Dr. O'Keefe's forecasts are possible. The reality for dentists in 20 years' time may well be a composite of all 4 future scenarios.

Dr. O'Keefe's lecture snaps us out of the complacency of the present and raises the question for all to ponder: What is our destiny as a profession? CDA asks this question of itself repeatedly, and available knowledge is implemented into strategic planning to guide our operations and projects.

For example: In 1999, I chaired a task force on the future of CDAnet. Realizing that the transmission speed requirement of the new health claim

standards now being developed will be greater than the capacity of the CDAnet infrastructure, we tasked Dr. Benoit Soucy, CDA's director of membership and professional services, and his team to look into an Internet-based communication system that will serve the marketplace in the short and long term. The result of this high-priority project is iTRANS™, a new service that CDA is developing to take full advantage of the Internet for the transmission of health claims between dental offices and insurance carriers. iTRANS™ will provide state-of-the-art security and privacy features that simply cannot be offered by CDAnet.

Dentists who are currently using CDAnet should be reassured that CDA plans to keep CDAnet in operation as long as this service is technologically sustainable.

Canadian dentistry is now well placed in terms of future claims transmission, but we must not be complacent. In other areas, CDA is laying the foundation for its future in a stepped-up government relations program. While CDA has always been active in this area, dentistry is clearly losing its autonomy. As an example: The Canadian Forces Dental Services are no longer independent, but a subsection of the Canadian Forces Health Services, responsible for all medical treatment in the Canadian military. I wonder if one reason for the apparent lack of attention to dentistry is because we are too good at what we do. Most Canadians have not yet experienced a level of discomfort in their oral health such as to incite political action.

Case in point: more positions at dental faculties are open now than when I wrote my "No Professors, No Profession" column in February. I am hearing distressing comments from administrators, who say they are no longer advertising available positions,

because it is a waste of money. Nor are any North American applicants presenting themselves for these positions. This is most disturbing, as our future depends on having good schools.

CDA is also working on consumer research in and out of the profession and on non-dues revenue generation.

As I write my final column as CDA president, I reflect on what a privilege it has been to serve the profession in this capacity. The insight into the workings of government, dealing with complex issues and preparing for future challenges have been interesting and engaging activities.

The expertise and quality service of the staff at CDA is very impressive. Our work as volunteers is often done on evenings and weekends. Whenever I sent an e-mail message to CDA's headquarters in those off-hours, I was always pleasantly surprised to receive a quick response, testifying to the dedication and hard work of the staff.

It is particularly satisfying to hand off responsibility with confidence. To CDA's executive director George Weber, and to the incoming officials — president Dr. Tom Breneman, president-elect Dr. Louis Dubé and vice-president Dr. Alfred Dean — my thanks and a vote of confidence for the future under your leadership.

Dr. O'Keefe concludes his presentation by stressing the need for new alliances between the profession and advocacy groups such as grey power. Yet, whatever the future has in store for us, CDA, as a service organization, and dentistry, as a service profession, must always be mindful of the ultimate goal — good oral health for all Canadians.

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