

President's Column

WHAT NEXT FOR DENTAL EDUCATION?



Dr. Tom Breneman

When Dr. William A. MacInnis (dean of Dalhousie University's faculty of dentistry and president of the Association of Canadian Faculties of Dentistry) delivered a presentation on the issues facing academic dentistry to CDA's Executive Council in June 2000, CDA rose to the challenge. The concerns expressed by Dr. MacInnis were many and dental research funding was identified as a major worry.

The model for government-sponsored research funding in Canada had changed in April 2000 with the replacement of the Medical Research Council by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR). There was a risk that, under this new model, funding for dental research could become harder to access. Those involved in dental research realized that they required some expertise in raising their profile and getting the

message of dentistry to decision-makers.

The Canadian Association for Dental Research (CADR) invited CDA to lobby for the nomination of dentists to CIHR's advisory boards. Realizing that 7% of health care expenditures in Canada are dental-related, while only 1.5% of research funding is, we knew we had a big challenge ahead of us. So we were satisfied with the limited success achieved by the profession with the nomination of Dr. James Lund, dean of McGill University's faculty of dentistry, to the advisory board of the Institute of Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis (IMHA).

Other serious concerns for dental education are current shortages of qualified professors, impending shortages as our current cohort of professors reaches retirement age, funding shortfalls for infrastructure, the knowledge explosion and how to best equip our grads for the realities of practice.

And so, CDA stepped up to the plate and, under the capable guidance of Dr. Benoit Soucy, conceived a forum whereby academic dentists (deans, researchers, etc.) could be brought together with practitioners (generalists, specialists and regulators) and others, including industry representatives and students, to resolve any disconnect between academic dentists and practitioners. Thus, the Dental Academic Summit was born.

The chair, Dr. Johann De Vries (dean of the University of Manitoba's faculty of dentistry) did a marvelous job of setting the tone and leading us through the workshop discussions. Six topics were chosen from among the issues suggested during the kick-off brainstorming session. Groups were formed to discuss and report back on the 6 topics: *New Dentists — What Do They Need to Be Successful?; Fostering a Relationship between the Dentist and*

Academia after Graduation; Building Bridges between Clinical Faculty and Researchers; How to Create a Unified Voice in the Profession, How to Stop Fragmentation; Improving the Public Image of the Dental Profession to Encourage the Recruitment of Dentists and Academics; Where Do the Resources Come from to Ensure the Future of Our Profession?

The discussion and summary reports did not in themselves lead to conclusions. Rather, this was an important beginning that will assist the participants to take the next steps, with CDA as quarterback.

As with any issue, the first step is to realize that there is a concern and then examine and define the parameters of the concern. We need to become more aware and knowledgeable of the implications of this issue on our practices, and on the public we serve.

Now, as a result of the summit, we have the knowledge base to begin developing a strategy to deal with our concerns. As you realize, though, from the topics that were discussed, the entire spectrum of relationships and accountability between academic dentists and practitioners is being examined, so the challenges of designing a strategy and implementing the plan will take further communication and require the involvement of all stakeholder groups.

This entire process of a broad-spectrum issue affecting dentistry being brought forward and the process of bringing all stakeholder groups together to identify the parameters and work to resolve the issue is one of the roles that CDA plays for the overall betterment of our profession.

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