

President's Column

THE TRUE MEANING OF BEING A PROFESSIONAL



Dr. Tom Breneman

As one of the 17,000 members of the Canadian dental profession who receive this prestigious scientific journal that is *JCDA*, I sometimes ask myself — what exactly does the word “professional” mean? What are its connotations for our practices and our personal lives?

A profession can be defined as a self-disciplined group of individuals who hold themselves up to the public as possessing a special skill derived from extensive training and education, and who are prepared to exercise that skill primarily in the interests of others.

In the case of dentistry, the possession of this specialized body of knowledge is maintained, enhanced and passed on by our academic institutions. Self-discipline is given to those who have specialized knowledge not readily available to the rest of society, and who are best able to determine

for society how that knowledge should be used. It is understood that members of the profession will devote themselves to serving the best interests of society and will self-regulate to maintain high-quality service.

What attributes should we professionals have and seek to improve upon? I would suggest that we focus on maintenance of competence, ethical behaviour, integrity, honesty, altruism, service to others, adherence to professional codes, justice and respect for others.

We have a range of responsibilities to our patients, our profession and our larger community. We must assist the Canadian public in general and our patients in particular to achieve and maintain optimal oral health. This includes a full range of masticatory function, freedom from pain and discomfort, and esthetics that enhance self-worth.

The high esteem in which our profession is held today did not just happen accidentally, but rather evolved from the inputs and hard work of those many dentists who preceded us, ever since the French dentist Pierre Fauchard elevated dentistry from a trade to a profession in the mid-1700s. It is our responsibility, not only to preserve what has been accomplished to date, but more importantly, to build on the foundation laid by those who preceded us.

At an entry level, we need to belong and offer our financial support to local, provincial and national associations, so that efforts to advocate and represent the best interests of our profession — and of the public we serve — might continue and, indeed, be enhanced.

In this era of government cutbacks to our education facilities, we must consider the option of direct financial support to faculties of dentistry, or indirect support through the

Dentistry Canada Fund (DCF) for research and grants. For, without enhancing and maintaining our special body of knowledge, we would not have a profession.

Then, as time, energy and resources permit, we need to personally get involved in the events that shape our profession. By personal experience, I can assure you that this involvement helps the profession. The opportunity to meet and get to know others with similar goals and aspirations for dentistry, and the personal growth achieved, far outweigh the commitment of time and energy.

Our willingness to volunteer and get involved in the affairs of our home communities is appreciated, as we bring many unique qualities to the table. By giving back to the community, we gain many interpersonal skills and make solid friendships that enhance our lives, both personally and professionally.

To the best of my knowledge, the only way to be involved in so many spheres, while maintaining a semblance of balance in our lives, is to work closely with others in a sharing environment. This team approach works well not only in our practices, but in our family life and in our volunteer activities as well.

Fulfilling our professional and personal commitments affords us the opportunity to meet many people and to learn from others, while enhancing our profession by adding value through our positive input.

*Tom Breneman, DMD
president@cda-adc.ca*