

# President's Column

## LOOKING BEYOND OUR BORDERS



Dr. Alfred Dean

It is always difficult to decide what programs and issues CDA should be involved in. One topic that provokes debate is CDA's involvement in the FDI World Dental Federation. With all the national-level issues and responsibilities CDA focuses on to meet our members' needs, it is difficult to remain compassionate about oral health issues in the international domain. Why is CDA actively involved in FDI? Well, let me try to explain.

I have just returned from the FDI World Dental Congress meetings in New Delhi, India. India is a beautiful country, yet what a land of contrasts. It has the most awe-inspiring cultural monuments, yet there is poverty everywhere. There are people talking on their cell phones, yet there are beggars on the street corners. India has a population of nearly 1 billion, yet monumental health care issues continue to affect its people.

Oral cancer is the second largest killer of men and women in the

Indian subcontinent, and almost 1 million new cases are diagnosed each year. Despite these statistics, the use of chewing tobacco and other forms of smokeless tobacco is widespread. Smokers abound, including those who practise the dangerous act of "reverse smoking." This entails smoking with the hot end of the cigarette in your mouth. Tobacco use is deeply woven into the Indian cultural fabric, which makes bringing the message of tobacco control to countries like India a massive, but necessary, undertaking.

This is where FDI comes in. Working in conjunction with other international organizations, FDI's various committees and councils aim to improve the oral health of people around the world. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is an international agreement, where the signatory countries commit to working towards tobacco reduction. FDI is perfectly suited to spread this message to the undeveloped world through its Statements on Oral Health and its continuing education programs.

FDI also collaborated with WHO this year to organize the Planning Conference for Oral Health in the African Region, held in Nairobi, Kenya. This most successful event saw all African countries come together to discuss common oral health issues for the very first time. The resulting Nairobi Declaration was a landmark achievement, with its key principle being to increase access to basic dental care — something that is far from a reality for the majority of the world's population.

In a speech delivered to the American Dental Association in Orlando, former British prime minister John Major talked about the growing disparities between the developed and the undeveloped world. His

treatise is that the developed world must be mindful of its obligation to help the undeveloped world reach its potential. According to Mr. Major, if this goal is not prioritized, the Western nations will bear the social and economic consequences.

FDI has 118 regular member associations and few have a greater ability to influence decision-making as much as Canada. Our opinion is very well received and considered. As an example, I was able to give a Canadian perspective to the FDI Oral Health Statement on lifelong learning in dentistry, which resulted in significant changes to the original document. Apart from the professional knowledge we offer, we also provide organizational expertise. The new FDI governance model was recently approved by FDI Council, due in large part to the hard work of Dr. Burton Conrod, a recent past-president of CDA.

Next August, Montreal will host the FDI World Dental Congress. There is incredible excitement and anticipation around the world in advance of these meetings. While it is dangerous to predict numbers, this Congress is shaping up to have the greatest attendance in the last several years, as we fully expect 20,000 people to come to Montreal for the event.

I would encourage you to make plans to attend the 2005 Congress. It will be a great opportunity to have a rewarding professional and educational experience, while tapping into the global network of dentistry. By attending the Congress, not only do you contribute to the advancement of your profession, you also help FDI deliver its message of optimal oral health to people worldwide.

We need your help. Please help us.

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