

President's Column

BRINGING YOUR CONCERNS TO PARLIAMENT HILL



Dr. Alfred Dean

The new federal government has begun the process of preparing for its next budget and has called for submissions to the Standing Committee on Finance to that end. Each year when these discussions take place, CDA makes a submission on your behalf, as part of our ongoing government relations efforts.

As a national organization, making representation to the federal government is one of the most valuable things we do. In a recent survey of Canadian dentists, you expressed the importance you place upon CDA's government lobbying efforts. Our work is coordinated under the auspices of the Government Relations and Public Advocacy Committee and its current chair, Dr. Phil Poon of Manitoba. The committee is supported by the government relations department at CDA.

Making Canadian dentists' wants and needs known to government takes on many forms, including regular

communication with members of Parliament and their staff, bureaucrats, committees and the relevant government departments. We are active participants in the Retirement Income Coalition, the National Professional Association Coalition on Tuition and the Canadian Coalition for Action on Tobacco, to name only 3 initiatives. CDA also responds to direct inquiries from government and its agencies.

Following our submission to the Finance Committee, the next big event will be CDA's "Days on the Hill." Working on your behalf, we will spend 2 days "storming" Parliament Hill, meeting with as many parliamentarians as time permits. Joining CDA leadership and the Government Relations Committee at these meetings will be a representative of the faculty deans and aboriginal representatives.

We have confirmed meetings with the ministers of Health, Public Health and Human Resources and Skills Development. The Opposition and NDP health critics and the Opposition immigration critic will also hear our concerns. In addition, we will meet with the parliamentary secretaries on Health and Indian and Northern Affairs as well as the chair of the Health Committee.

The subjects we will address with these decision-makers are varied, but are all aimed at benefiting dentists, our patients and our profession. Public health issues like access to care and the primacy of the dentist in delivering oral health care will receive attention. We will be addressing the unprecedented funding crisis facing dental faculties, including the severe problems they encounter in attracting educators from the private sector. We will be stressing that government demonstrably reinvest in tobacco reduction strategies. We will be advocating for the immediate appointment

of a Chief Dental Officer to spearhead oral health promotion activities, including the collection of national oral health indicators.

We will be re-emphasizing the fact that the oral health status of First Nations and Inuit Canadians requires greater attention, as the dental portion of the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program continues to suffer from serious flaws. In April 2003, the Standing Committee on Health held a special meeting to examine the oral health of First Nations and Inuit. The resulting report made strong recommendations for improving the NIHB program; however, these recommendations have yet to be embraced by the department.

Finally, the issues that affect your pocketbook, such as RRSP contribution increases and the deductibility of dental plan premiums, will also be on the agenda.

I trust you can recognize that CDA is tirelessly working on your behalf to ensure that the issues which affect you are front and centre when we speak to governments. What can you do? If you are a CDA member, you can continue to support this great national organization. If you are not a member, then I hope I have made a strong case to earn your membership.

We need your help. Please help us.

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My July/August column ("Who represents you?") continues to draw comments from both sides of the spectrum. It is important that you know it was not my intention to create division, but rather to stir debate. Please understand that the President's Column strictly contains my views and does not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the Board of Directors or the Canadian Dental Association.