

President's Column

WHO REPRESENTS YOU?



Dr. Alfred Dean

In my inaugural column, I shared with you a “letter” from a concerned CDA member. The letter was a compilation of comments I have been hearing from real members of the Association. Well, the mail keeps coming in. This time, the concerned member brings up an interesting topic, one that is beginning to occupy much discussion time in many circles.

Dear Dr. Dean,

Recently, I was talking to a fellow dentist who said he could be better represented by a national association of regulatory bodies because all dentists belong to a regulatory body by virtue of the fact that they must pay a licensing fee. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to him that this regulatory group would be in a better position to lobby on behalf of dentists. Not coincidentally, I hear the term “member” used more frequently when regulators speak about dentists.

These boards are constituted mainly by dentists, so they should have the interests

of dentists in mind. After all, what is the point of having a self-regulating profession if these boards are not going to look out for my best interests.

I ask you, Mr. President, what my provincial and national dental associations do for me that these regulators cannot do?

Sincerely,

A concerned CDA member

For more than one hundred years, organized dentistry has worked to serve the best interests of both the profession and the public. This goal has been achieved through cooperation with the many stakeholders who comprise the profession, especially the member-service associations and the regulators. In fact, for many years it was normal for regulators and provincial dental associations to be one and the same. This is still the case today in a few provinces. One wonders, however, about the inherent conflict in this relationship and whether it is only a matter of time before these organizations are separated into 2 distinct bodies in every province.

Dental regulatory boards are arms of their provincial governments and have been created with the specific purpose of ensuring that the public is well served and receiving adequate dental care. Under this mandate, the boards determine standards of care and “police” the profession to ensure the standards are met. It seems easy to say that because these boards are mostly made up of dentists, they must be friends of dentistry. I submit to you that because the interests of the public must take precedence, these boards are not my advocates. I also don’t believe that the public would be comfortable if they thought that the people protecting their interests were also protecting the interests of dentists.

Self-regulation is a very precious and easily damaged commodity. I believe that when a regulator calls me a “member,” it does real harm to the concept of self-regulation. Member-service associations can advocate on behalf of dentistry because they are free of legislative constraints. What a healthy, self-regulating profession needs is both public and professional advocacy working in tandem. I believe that public advocacy is beneficial to the profession and that professional advocacy will result in patients who are better cared for.

Let’s look at the specific example of the credentialing of foreign-trained professionals. On this issue, regulators have to protect the best interests of Canadian citizens. However, dentists also have a vested interest because they are concerned about maintaining the profession’s reputation for high standards of care. CDA recently co-hosted a forum on this very issue. Only CDA had the ability to bring together all stakeholders, including academia, regulators and practising dentists, to discuss this important issue. We believe that input from all stakeholders is the way to ensure optimal oral care for Canadians.

CDA has a long history of being an inclusive organization that has the credibility to bring stakeholders together to find solutions to the pressing issues of the day. The dentistry performed in St John’s is identical to the dentistry performed in Vancouver. This is no accident. For more than a century, all stakeholders in organized dentistry have worked together to ensure that the best interests of both the public and the practitioner have been considered. We need strong member-service organizations. Help us to help you.

Who is representing you?

Alfred Dean, DDS
president@cda-adc.ca