

# President's Column

## EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN



Dr. Alfred Dean

With a slight air of nostalgia as 2004 drew to a close, I sat down to comb through some old copies of the *Journal of the Canadian Dental Association*. I was curious to see what the topics of concern were some 25 to 30 years ago, well before I graduated from Dalhousie University. This exercise produced surprising results, as I quickly realized that organized dentistry continues to wrestle with many of the same topics today. Allow me to take you on a tour down memory lane.

If we travel back to 1968, Pierre Trudeau was pirouetting into power in Ottawa and Montreal was celebrating its new professional baseball franchise, rather than seeing it return to the U.S. That same year saw CDA coping with 4 successive budget deficits and appealing to its members for understanding. Compare this to today when CDA has accomplished at

least 4 consecutive balanced budgets, thanks in part to solid fiscal management by your Board of Directors.

In 1968, the Association was concerned that after several years of inaction the federal government had not responded to CDA's call for more professional training grants to help dentists prepare for teaching at university. This initiative was in response to a need for 200 extra teachers, as dental schools were preparing for increased enrolment in the coming years. CDA cautioned that "the looming teacher shortage is so serious that it is inadvisable to ignore it" (November *Journal*, p. 516). This sounds remarkably similar to our current dictum, "No Professors — No Profession." Faculty shortages are part of the current crisis in dental education and CDA continues to broach this topic with government, most recently at our 2004 "Days on the Hill" meetings.

In the 1960s, the profession was concerned about a shortage of dental manpower in Canada. During that decade, we successfully lobbied governments to increase the capacity to produce dentists. However, by 1981 the situation had reversed itself and the new concerns were centred on a perceived oversupply of dentists. Regrettably, the profession again finds itself in the position of convincing government of the precarious situation of our dental faculties, a consequence of sustained years of government underfunding. This past November, CDA organized an Academic Summit as part of our commitment to provide assistance to the academic community.

Moving to February 1969, CDA met with representatives of the provincial associations to discuss, "status, rights and duties of the corporate members; composition, power and duties of the Board of Governors and the Executive Council...and the composition and duties of CDA

councils, committees and sections" (April *Journal*, p. 169). Such concerns echo CDA's major governance and committee restructuring in recent years, which is aimed at making the Association more flexible and nimble in our new knowledge-based decision-making framework.

If we jump ahead to 1981, Pierre Trudeau was still smelling the roses as prime minister. In June, the nation mourned the courageous Terry Fox, who succumbed to cancer.

That same month, the CDA Taxation Committee convened to review individual pension plans with their counterparts in the Canadian Bar Association, the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Association of Chartered Accountants. This collective investigated the right for self-employed professionals to create tax-sheltered pension plans. While RRSPs are now a mainstay of the modern dentist's retirement portfolio, CDA continues to work on this issue, pressing the government for increases in personal contribution limits, as evident in our active involvement with the Retirement Income Coalition.

What does this recurrence of issues in dentistry mean? It should not imply that nothing has changed and that the efforts of successive regimes of CDA leadership has been all for naught. Rather, it shows that we must continue to address these issues to ensure improvements in our members' standard of living while sustaining dentistry as a viable profession.

This sentimental journey allowed me to appreciate CDA's rich history of service to the profession. Dentistry in Canada has benefited from these years of service, and in return we must support our Association so this great work can continue.

We need your help. Please help us.

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