

# Editorial

## ESSENTIAL READING FOR DENTISTS



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

A mentor once told me that an editor knows he is doing his job when people are angry at him. Some time ago, I received a number of animated phone calls expressing displeasure in some quarters about a feature that appeared in *JCDA*. One person said that, while he was very upset, he could take consolation from the fact that the article would probably not attract much attention among Canadian dentists, as so few of them actually read the *Journal*.

During my time as editor, I have occasionally heard people express this notion and I often wondered how true it might be. Dentists are busy people, and it can be very difficult to find quality time to sit down and read a journal without interruption or distraction. Some colleagues tell me they find more commercial publications particularly appealing, because

the articles focus on everyday clinical matters and contain attractive clinical photographs.

Three years ago, I asked a group of 9 general dentists and 1 specialist whether they would open *JCDA* or *Oral Health* first, if these were the only 2 publications on their desk. Only the specialist indicated that he would open *JCDA* first. When I probed the generalists further, they said they would open the other publication first, mainly to flick through the photos.

The message that I took away from these colleagues, and from other reader input, is that we needed to adopt a communication strategy that employed some of the desired elements of commercial publications, but still maintained an editorial integrity that our readers expect and demand. Every feature we have incorporated into *JCDA*, over the past 3 years in particular, has been guided by these principles. We constantly seek feedback from readers to evaluate how the new features are received.

That feedback system has been telling me that you believe the recent changes in *JCDA* are positive and that the new developments make the publication more attractive, pertinent and interesting. Until recently, this feedback has been mainly informal. However, the positive perceptions have been confirmed by an extensive survey of the reading preferences of Canadian dentists conducted earlier this year. A stratified random sample of 1,029 dentists was approached and 665 colleagues, highly representative of the profession in Canada, responded to a questionnaire — one whose validity has been established over time in the medical publications market.

The survey showed that *JCDA* compared very well to *Oral Health* on the following indicators: number of the last 4 issues read, length of time spent reading, proportion of pages read and

pertinence of publication content to practice. If the historical stereotype held true, *JCDA* should have placed a distant second to the commercial publication. Rather, both publications were virtually tied on all these measures and *JCDA* was the leader in terms of credibility of content.

Since, according to the survey, 76% of Canadian dentists read an average issue of *JCDA*, I can confidently declare the myth that nobody reads the publication to be well and truly dead. I believe *JCDA* is essential reading for the Canadian dentist who wishes to stay informed about the most significant developments in our profession. This includes clinical matters, the major issues facing the profession, dental news from Canada and around the world, as well as what CDA is doing on behalf of dentists, their practice and their profession.

I am convinced that one of our most important roles is to keep you informed about the developing issues that affect how you practise your profession. Presenting and discussing topics like changing scopes of practice, international migration of professionals, evolving methods of payment for professional services, the development of the electronic health record, the sustainability of the dental education sector and access to oral health care for vulnerable groups in society is where *JCDA* can really shine and provide leadership. We are also committed to publishing useful and credible answers to your clinical questions.

Our role is to provide you with information and give you a forum to articulate your opinions about issues important to you as a professional. In doing so, I hope we will generate more light than heat.

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