

President's Column

TURNING STRATEGIES INTO ACTION



Dr. Jack Cottrell

My first duty as your president was to chair the 2005 Strategic Forum. This forum, the only one of its kind in Canada, is an integral part of CDA's new governance framework. It provides an opportunity for key stakeholders in Canadian dentistry to meet in an interactive setting to illuminate and discuss emerging issues in the profession.

The topic for this year's Strategic Forum was access to oral health care. This was an ideal theme for the assembled group as it crosses jurisdictional boundaries and involves considerations such as models of care, scope of practice, portability, funding and licensure.

Oral health is a vital part of overall health, and as such, it is imperative that the profession focus its efforts on ensuring that all Canadians have timely access to excellent oral health care services. With effective leadership by our profession, innovative

programs can be designed and implemented to meet the needs of the underserved. However, in our quest to solve the access to care dilemma, we must never undermine what I feel are the basic tenets of care, namely that the best oral health care is delivered in a collaborative, fee-for-service team environment with the dentist as the leader of the oral health care team.

This is an enormously complex challenge but one that we must not shy away from. Rather, we should take this opportunity to display our commitment to patient care.

The Strategic Forum's panel discussion was moderated by CDA's editor-in-chief, Dr. John O'Keefe. Speakers were chosen to provide 4 divergent perspectives on the issue of access to care. Their presentations stimulated a dynamic and engaging session that generated many pertinent comments from the audience.

The panel consisted of Dr. Johann de Vries, dean of dentistry at the University of Manitoba, who spoke about potential community outreach and residency programs that could be offered through universities. As well, he encouraged dental faculties to adopt a service-learning model of care that promotes social engagement in new dentists.

Dr. James Leake, professor and head of community dentistry at the University of Toronto's faculty of dentistry, spoke of the role of publicly funded dental health programs, the rights of the public to receive care and his work with the Toronto Dental Coalition.

Dr. Sven Grail, senior partner of Altima Dental Corporation, spoke on how access to dental care issues can be addressed through a private model of care.

Finally, Richard Green, an executive with the American Dental Association's (ADA) Council on

Communications, spoke of his role in helping launch the ADA's "Give Kids a Smile" program. This coordinated outreach program allocates one day a year for free dental care to underserved children across the United States.

Although each presenter had quite different opinions on access to care, common themes and strategies emerged. These included working to coordinate the various advocacy programs that currently take place across Canada. Others in the audience felt that programs for children, or those that include helping people travel for a dental visit, should be pursued further. The dental profession has a genuine sense of social responsibility but could benefit from increased promotion of its efforts. There was consensus that the profession itself must take a more active and visible role in improving access to care before other groups intervene.

The time is right for action — especially with CDA's recent successful lobbying effort for the appointment of a Chief Dental Officer in Canada. Dr. Peter Cooney will play a crucial role in improving access to care and facilitating the collection of much needed national oral health data.

The views expressed during the forum, along with extensive background documentation from previous work in this area, will be used to construct a framework for action. Success requires the commitment of people, investment in partnerships and sustainability of effective programs. Our message of oral health care for all Canadians will be more powerful and more likely to stimulate action if all groups involved with this issue (i.e., the profession, government, society and industry) join hands and work together toward a common goal.

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