



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

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## Sharing Experiences and Generating Wisdom

The natural tension between the professional and business aspects of dentistry fascinates me. One perspective on that topic, from a person who has been around organized dentistry for many years, stands out in my mind. It is that “when times are good, we think as professionals, but when times are difficult, we think more as business people.”

I am hearing a growing murmur from colleagues that there is more emphasis on dentistry as a business today than in the past, and that our collegiality as professionals is dissipating as a result. A general practitioner from a major Canadian city put it well when he told me that he was finding it increasingly difficult to think of other dentists as colleagues when he was viewing them now more as business competitors.

These colleagues are observing that we are becoming less inclined to think collectively as a profession and to have a sharing outlook toward other dentists. Because of a host of competing pressures, we also seem to be less willing to share our time and expertise through volunteering for professional association activities.

Current leaders bemoan the seeming unwillingness of a new generation to take positions of responsibility, or even to attend professional meetings to discuss ideas of importance to the profession. My own particular concern is to find new ways for more Canadian dentists to share their considerable professional expertise and wisdom through the pages of this publication and other communication vehicles of CDA.

Almost 9 out of 10 dentists in this country are general practitioners. Each has a unique story to tell about how they set up their practice, the biggest professional mistakes they made and the techniques that work particularly well for them. Many have pearls of advice that would be of great benefit to young colleagues starting out in their careers. Despite all this, general practitioners are seldom found among the rank

of authors in this publication. I would like that to change.

I am encouraged that general practitioners play prominent roles as authors in this edition. I particularly enjoyed reading the article by Dr. Andy Nette (page 611), who has been in general practice in Nova Scotia for 31 years. He shares some of the most valuable professional insights he has acquired during these years.

From what I hear, Dr. Nette is a real “dentist’s dentist” who, despite a busy practice, has always found time to be involved in dental organizations and to help colleagues, especially in their times of greatest need. I know from my travels that there are others like Dr. Nette that we have to identify and persuade to share their wisdom. We also have to use new tools to make it easier to “bottle” this wisdom so it can be shared with colleagues.

One example of using new tools to produce interesting material is the exchange of letters between Drs. Roger Howard and George Sándor (page 557). This is an edited version of an exchange of email messages that began when Dr. Howard approached me with a clinical question about bisphosphonates and osteonecrosis. I forwarded this initial query to Dr. Sandor who provided his first response within hours.

Recorded telephone conversations captured the experiences of Dr. Ali Farahani about the process of setting up his “eco-friendly” dental office (page 581). I believe that such recorded telephone conversations and email exchanges can remove perceived barriers and make it easier for colleagues to work with us to draft articles on their thoughts about professional topics.

The general practitioners mentioned above, as well as Dr. Ben Balevi who writes about the use of the VELscope in general practice (page 603), all approached me with their ideas for information sharing. It was my job to help them carry their ideas forward for publication. There is so much wisdom among Canadian dentists that deserves to be shared in a similar manner, and I know that with a bit of joint effort we can bring it to the attention of colleagues for our collective benefit.

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