



Dr. Darryl Smith

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## The Canadian Connection to Global Oral Health

A long-time colleague recently called to ask when I was going to go with him on his next dental mission to Guatemala. He vividly described the total lack of access to care and the severe disease and suffering of the Guatemalan people. He went on to say how his experience made him appreciate how fortunate he was to be a Canadian. I applaud the many Canadians who, like my colleague, give of their time, skills and financial resources to work all over the world to help the disadvantaged.

The reality is that these humanitarian missions, while extremely important and desperately needed, tend to have only local and short-term effects. Much longer and sustained programs dealing with oral disease need to be developed within countries lacking care, and governments must train their own citizens to deliver care and establish preventive programs.

Disturbingly, the ravages of oral disease have taken a back seat to other health concerns on the world stage. Until this year, oral health had not been on the agenda of the World Health Organization (WHO) since 1981. Fortunately, in May, the 60th World Health Assembly of WHO adopted the resolution and accompanying report, *Oral health: action plan for promotion and integrated disease prevention*. Canada was a strong supporter of this resolution, and FDI World Dental Federation (FDI) and Canadian government health officials represented Canadian dentists throughout the process.

This resolution contains strong recommendations, delivering the message that oral health must be seen as a primary health concern for all member nations of WHO, not only less developed countries. I encourage you to read the complete document, which acknowledges “the intrinsic link between oral health, general health and the quality of life.”<sup>1</sup>

Among the many important recommendations, WHO member states are urged to take the necessary steps to provide essential oral care, to incorporate oral health into enhanced primary care frameworks, and to promote oral health prevention programs and services for poor and disadvantaged populations in collaboration with existing health prevention programs. Member states are also urged to make provisions for oral health human resources under their national health strategies. Finally, the report recommends that WHO strengthens its world leadership in oral health by increasing financial and human resources for oral health care at all levels.

We are all affected by what occurs on the global health scene, both personally and professionally. The recent recalls of tainted toothpaste show how the care we provide is influenced from abroad. CDA keeps on top of what is happening by partnering with organizations nationally and internationally. Bilateral meetings with counterparts such as the American Dental Association, or through involvement with FDI, are critical so we can position the profession in Canada to meet its members' needs and serve our patients.

This October at the 2007 FDI World Congress in Dubai, Canadian dentists will see one of our own, Dr. Burton Conrod of Sydney, Nova Scotia, become the first Canadian ever to be installed as president of FDI since its inception in 1900.

Dr. Conrod has never been one to shy away from committing himself to bettering the profession at the local, provincial, national and now, international levels, dedicating countless volunteer hours over the years. The support of his family, particularly that of his wife and practice partner, Dr. Connie Conrod, has been key, and only those involved in organized dentistry can truly fathom the commitment required for such involvement. There are many others who have supported Dr. Conrod and helped him achieve this accomplishment, most notably the immediate past executive director of CDA, Mr. George Weber.

Congratulations, Burton, from all your friends and colleagues at CDA.

### Reference

1. World Health Organization. Resolution on *Oral health: action plan for promotion and integrated disease prevention*. EB 120.R5. Available: [www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/EB120/B120\\_R5-en.pdf](http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB120/B120_R5-en.pdf).

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