



Dr. Deborah Stymiest

“Strengthening our messages and sharing our communication tools will result in a better-educated and ultimately healthier public.”

Unified Voice, Unified Message

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines communications as a process by which information is exchanged between individuals. I would like to think that some of the profession's oral health information reaches individuals through our associations. The advantage of building a closer relationship between CDA and the provincial dental associations is the ability to create a modern and efficient communication bridge to our patients.

We are living in the information age. Communications and information technologies pervade our homes, our workplaces, our schools and, seemingly, our every waking hour. It should come as no surprise that our patients are increasingly turning to the Internet and the World Wide Web to find their oral health information. Patients are more sophisticated, better educated and want to make informed decisions about their oral health. I believe that the Canadian dental profession can still make improvements in coordinating the oral health messages that we broadcast to the public.

At the recent Ontario Dental Association (ODA) general council meeting, I had the privilege of witnessing the launch of the new ODA website for patients called YourOralHealth.ca. The website uses cutting-edge technology and I was very impressed with its interactive features, informative video clips and the overall user-friendly nature of the site. It really struck me as a communication vehicle designed for the modern dental patient.

Inspired by this demonstration, I then visited the public side of all the provincial dental association websites as well as CDA's own website. Wow! As a profession, we have created some wonderful content designed for patients from coast to coast.

This exercise piqued my interest and led me to imagine what the future may hold for our

profession's communications — perhaps the creation of a single website that would link the Canadian public to the information found in all of the provincial websites. A single click to experience the best and most current, practical information that dentistry has to offer. A website where dentists and dental personnel can communicate best practices and prevention messages to patients.

Embracing technology while sharing and creating consistent best messages is something that the profession can accomplish. We must recognize that while the efforts of those who produce our messages is important, whether it is a message from CDA, the New Brunswick Dental Society or the Alberta Dental Association and College, the emphasis should be on what is being said, not on who is saying it.

I believe that effective communication is a crucial ingredient of strong leadership. I look forward to CDA facilitating the coordination of the profession's collective communication efforts. CDA hopes to continue working with our corporate members to develop a new communications model. As part of this revised framework, a communications team would bring together representatives from the provincial dental associations to identify the professions' various communication vehicles and resources with the primary goal of reaching as many patients as possible. Strengthening our messages and sharing our communication tools will result in a better-educated and ultimately healthier public. Shouldn't this be the collective goal of the profession?

I believe that the more fragmented our communications, the less the public learns. I invite you to visit the public side of the CDA and the provincial dental association websites — perhaps you will also realize that our patients have so much to gain if we speak with a unified voice on the message of optimal oral health.

As the American educator and author John Powell said, “Communication works for those who work at it.” Speaking with a unified voice will elevate the importance of our messages, raise the profile of the profession and ensure that we are heard.

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