



Dr. Deborah Stymiest

Positioning the Profession for Survey Results

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Dr. Peter Cooney and the Office of the Chief Dental Officer (OCDO) were featured prominently in the February edition of *JCDA*. Since its inception in 2004, one of the OCDO's top priorities has been to gather epidemiological information on the oral health of Canadians. As such, the OCDO was a catalyst in ensuring that an oral health component was included in a national, direct measures survey on the general health of Canadians.

The addition of a clinical oral health examination as part of the Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS) means that the Canadian dental profession will have the first direct evidence on the oral health status of Canadians in over 30 years. I mention the CHMS to raise awareness of the significance of the project and to emphasize the need for the profession to be prepared to act on the survey results, scheduled to be released in approximately one year's time.

The first cycle of the CHMS involved 2 years of data collection from 5,000 people aged 6 to 79 years from 15 sites across the country, representative of 97% of the national population. Clinical oral examinations were conducted by a team of 10 of our dental colleagues, supplied by the Department of National Defense. These exams were extensive, recording the state of natural and artificial teeth, oral pathology, fluorosis and orthodontic status.

The inclusion of oral health measures within the CHMS will help evaluate the link between oral health and other health conditions such as diabetes, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. It will also help to determine the relationship between oral health and socioeconomic indicators like nutrition, education levels and income.

The results of the CHMS will be released in 2 different reports, one directed at the general

population and the other, more technical report, aimed at dental professionals. This second report will probe the clinical findings in more depth. In anticipation of these CHMS reports, it is tempting to speculate on the results. I believe the survey will likely reveal 2 contrasting scenarios, illustrating the degree of progress we have made as a profession while also exposing where we may have fallen short in terms of access to dental care.

How will dentistry address the needs of the segments of the population identified to have the most dental disease and the most difficulty accessing care? And what plans will we put in place to address these needs? Further, if the survey demonstrates an intimate correlation between oral disease and systemic health, will we be prepared to partner with our medical counterparts to explore new models of health care delivery and funding? These are all serious questions that the profession will likely face.

When similar national oral health survey reports were published in other countries, such as the United States and Australia, significant public policy discussions ensued. In his interview in the February *JCDA*, Dr. Cooney stated that the OCDO will be examining the survey results with many stakeholders, including CDA and professional associations in the provinces and territories. Collectively, the dental profession must determine how it will respond to and address the findings of the survey.

CDA has been a member of the CHMS oral health steering committee since its inception. This committee has provided ongoing input and guidance on behalf of the oral care sector. CDA will now begin preparing the profession for the results of the CHMS through a consultation forum to be held during the upcoming General Assembly in April. This will be a very important starting point for encouraging discussions and developing strategies, coordinated by your national association.

It is crucial that we respond to the CHMS results as a united community. We must show Canadians that we are a strong profession of health care providers who understand the oral health needs of our nation and are willing to take action to ensure a healthy public. I believe we have the desire and will to act responsibly on these survey results.

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