



Dr. Don Friedlander

## Advocating for the Profession

CDA has adopted 3 clear, effective and results-oriented strategic priorities to help fulfill its mission, namely a strong profession, a united community and a healthy public. We will achieve these priorities by focusing CDA's core activities around knowledge and advocacy, 2 areas that can be considered the brand of the new CDA.

Advocacy is broadly defined as arguing in favour of, defending or recommending a particular cause or point of view. For CDA, advocacy is the pursuit of influencing outcomes that protect, promote and advance the dental profession. Our primary tools within the advocacy realm are government relations, media relations and public relations — what I informally refer to as “the 3 R's” of advocacy.

CDA's government relations activities take place on a variety of levels and in various formats. At a high level, CDA meets directly with politicians and their senior advisors and departmental officials throughout the year. These advocacy efforts culminate in the annual “Days on the Hill” meetings, where CDA representatives meet face to face with MPs in Ottawa.

As a member of this year's CDA delegation, I participated in discussions with Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff and close to 30 other MPs over the course of 2 days. Our message focused on seniors' access to oral health care, but we also discussed dentistry's position on the funding of oral health care and informed parliamentarians about the upcoming results of the Canadian Health Measures Survey and the Competition Bureau's study of dentistry (see p. 419).

CDA's previous government relations efforts have led to such successes as tax exemptions for health benefits and the creation of Health Canada's Office of the Chief Dental Officer. CDA also plays a strong advocacy role in sup-

porting the fluoridation of municipal water supplies and makes ongoing representation for dentistry on amalgam waste issues. Both of these issues are featured prominently in this edition of *JCDA* (see p. 451 and 424).

The goal of CDA's government relations activities is not about trying to score big victories, but more about having the profession be seen and heard at a series of smaller events over a sustained period of time. Attending political events and networking with political staff helps forge long-term relationships with key decision makers. And when CDA is invited to make formal presentations to government, we always come armed with solutions, not problems.

The next facet of CDA's advocacy efforts is our media relations, where we focus on providing strong messages on issues that affect the dental profession, the livelihood of dentists and the oral health of our patients. As the profession's advocate, CDA monitors the national and global media and develops internal and external relationships to ensure that we can mobilize the necessary expertise and knowledge when the situation arises. CDA is currently building a portfolio of comprehensive resources that will enable spokespeople from across the country to deliver well-informed interviews on oral health issues. This will ensure that the Canadian dental profession speaks with one voice in the mainstream media.

The final ‘R’ of advocacy, and another way of influencing outcomes, is through public relations (i.e., public education). CDA must continue to inform and convince the public of the vital role of dentists in society, and communicate the importance of oral health as an essential component of general health. CDA is active in promoting the leadership position of dentists and participated on a feature that appeared in the *Globe and Mail* in April as well as a series of articles to be published in the Canadian Medical Association's *Canadian Health* magazine.

CDA will continue to strengthen its advocacy efforts on behalf of its members, to protect, promote and advance the profession. We are well positioned to act, in partnership with our corporate members, as the voice of dentistry. For that is where our true strength lies in influencing outcomes — having a common informed message and speaking with one voice.

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