

# President's Column

## THE VALUE OF COOPERATION



*Dr. John Diggins*

**D**entists spend a lot of time impressing on patients the value of oral health and regular dental care. Health is often taken for granted and we don't miss it until it's gone. Because oral diseases are largely preventable, we stress the importance of prevention and work in partnership with our patients to achieve that goal.

Humans are a diverse lot; some have no great problem seeing the value of oral health, while others don't view oral health with the same priority. In the same way, there are many dentists who see the value of belonging to dental associations, while others feel there is little value in belonging to either their provincial or their national dental association.

There are many reasons why dental professionals hold these views, most of them sincerely held. Like the good dentist who wants to get the patient to work towards optimal oral health, I want to understand why people might not see value in being actively involved in organized dentistry. Why will some people hold back from supporting organizations

that are working to promote optimal oral health and create a better professional environment for dentists?

There can be no doubt but that organized dentistry is very effective when it speaks with one voice and works to influence your practice environment.

Two examples in recent years bear strong testament to this fact. CDA, in close cooperation with the provincial dental associations, lobbied vigorously and with great success to prevent the taxation of dental plan premiums. Your patients can thank the efforts of organized dentistry that they pay the lion's share of their dental costs in pre-tax rather than after-tax dollars. This tax exemption on premiums has ensured that employees and their families continue to choose dental benefits in their increasingly flexible benefits packages. Many of them would forgo dental plans if these premiums were taxed. Research shows that people without dental plans visit the dentist less regularly for those crucial prevention appointments.

Organized dentistry's other major success in recent years has been to keep managed care at bay in Canada. If you look at the U.S., managed care is now the predominant delivery system in medicine. While it has made less inroads in dentistry for a variety of reasons, many American dentists have a considerable managed care component to their practice. I believe that managed care has made very little headway in Canada largely because of the strength of the dental profession's lobbying activities.

Organized dentistry in Canada is a federation of provincial dental associations working in close liaison with other bodies dedicated to promoting oral health and to guiding the profession. I speak of dental regulatory authorities, dental schools and specialty groups. All come together at CDA to combine their talents in reaching common positions and in speaking with one voice for the benefit of the dental professional and all Canadians.

Individual dentists may feel that CDA doesn't provide immediate value to them in everyday practice compared to the value they get from provincial and local associations. Much of what we do at CDA comes to you through your provincial associations — you may not see the inner workings of CDA, but our input is definitely there.

A number of years ago, CDA, in cooperation with its provincial counterparts, decided to really work out "who does what" in Canada in organized dentistry. The process of cutting out overlap and increasing efficiency in the delivery of services continues. We at CDA are focusing on federal government relations and on providing information directly to dentists and indirectly through provincial associations. Our third area of concentration is in managing issues that are critical to the profession.

Issues management is a bit like managing a patient's oral health. We need to work continuously on prevention. We need to anticipate problems rather than react when a crisis hits. Our staff, in cooperation with those in provincial associations, are constantly scanning the environment, attempting to be proactive in issues management rather than reactive.

Some might say, "Why join CDA since there are no acute issues at present that are forcing us as a profession to the barricades?"

Perhaps it is because the national and provincial associations are working in close cooperation to manage issues preventively that the climate for the profession is looking quite healthy these days.

CDA is a vital part of organized dentistry in this country and we need and deserve your intellectual and financial support. Our part of the bargain is that we will use all our energies to ensure that your money and ideas are put to work with increasing efficiency.

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