

Editorial

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

This edition of *JCDA* is significant because we are cooperating with 2 important organizations to produce it. This is the first special issue of the *Journal* to be published in conjunction with the Canadian Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (CAOMS). It is notable also that with this issue, we are distributing a questionnaire, in collaboration with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), asking your opinions about priorities for the dental research agenda in Canada over the coming years.

Both collaborative efforts are manifestations of CDA's role in bringing the various sections of our profession together for the benefit of the Canadian public and in our own enlightened self-interest. Never before has such cooperation been so vital, because in recent years, it seems to me that our profession has been bent on fragmenting rather than working

together. I believe that the profession has found it harder to speak with one voice at a time when some of the influential stakeholders in our environment have been more powerful and united than ever before. It doesn't take a genius to understand what will happen to our profession if such trends continue.

While preoccupied with the day-to-day duties of running a dental office, it is easy to lose sight of our collective responsibilities for the development and advancement of the profession. And advance our profession we must, or we risk having some groups claim our scope of practice and others dictate the terms on which we deliver care to our patients.

Thinking of moving forward for survival, I am reminded of a scene from the Woody Allen movie *Annie Hall*, where Allen's character says to Diane Keaton that a relationship is like a shark, in that it has to keep moving forward to survive. He went on to say that their relationship was like a dead shark. Our body of knowledge, central to the maintenance and development of our profession's status, must constantly advance through the efforts of our university-based researchers.

If dental research is not encouraged in this country through adequate funding, Canadians will not maintain the eminent place they have achieved on the world dental research stage in recent years. University authorities will look more critically at dental faculties that do not contribute to the parent institution's goals in terms of research productivity. If a new cadre of oral health researchers is not trained to fill the jobs vacated by retiring baby-boomers, the outlook for Canadian dental research will be dim. I'm sorry if I sound negative. However, everything I have heard about this vital issue over the past few years points to a crisis in the making.

There is no separate oral health research institute in the new CIHR infrastructure (www.cihr.ca). Oral health research attracts no more than 1.5% of federal health research dollars in Canada; despite the fact that dental care accounts for approximately 7% of total health expenditures in this country. Yet Dr. Cyril Frank, the director of the institute where dental research is primarily housed in the CIHR, was upbeat when I asked him about the importance of oral health research within the CIHR.

Because Dr. Frank and our colleagues from Canadian academic dentistry asked CDA to facilitate their research survey asking dentists to list their priorities for the future of dental research in Canada, we are distributing the questionnaire with this issue. I encourage you to complete this anonymous survey tool and return it for analysis to Dr. Paul Allison of McGill University. I believe you will make a significant contribution to the future of dental research and our profession by giving your opinions.

On this note of encouragement, I would like to take an opportunity to wish all readers a peaceful and happy holiday season. This year has been momentous and traumatic in many ways from the tragic events of September 11, through our country's involvement in war, to the slowdown in our economy. The holiday season is a time to take stock and count our blessings. Next year will mark the 100th anniversary of CDA. We hope that it will be a positive year for dentists throughout Canada and that we can all enter the spirit of celebration with our national organization united as never before.

John O'Keefe
1-800-267-6354, ext. 2297
jokeefe@cda-adc.ca