

A Time of Progress

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hile listening to the proceedings of the recent California Dental Association Board of Trustees meeting, we came to one inescapable conclusion.

The first five months of the 2004 administrative year of CDA have been marked by remarkable progress and achievement.

The day-to-day activities continue, as they always have, to place a priority on providing outstanding membership services to CDA members. For example, not only is there a continuing effort to improve the quality of the educational programs provided at Scientific Sessions, but there have been efforts to improve one hurdle every registrant encounters, the amount of time it has taken, waiting in line, to obtain registration credentials at the meeting. This was a major dissatisfier for a member arriving with little time to spare before attending a C.E. session. This procedure was markedly improved this year. Trustees were also informed that continuing improvements would be made to a new C.E. credit entry procedure for each course that was initiated this year and at times required substantial waiting to access a computer.

Modifications to these Sessions procedures, while relatively minor in importance in the big picture of service to CDA members, nonetheless illustrate the commitment of CDA staff and volunteers to continually improve the quality of service provided to the membership.

However, the most significant achievements have not been directly related to immediate service to members. Rather, many have been part of a growing need for the profession to build its reputation in the communities we serve. While it may not always seem important to the individual member that the association encourage and coordinate programs that improve access to

care, dentistry does have an extremely important role to play. If CDA fails to make meaningful contributions to public initiatives in the 21st century, it will fail to fulfill the CDA mission ... *"To be the recognized symbol of excellence in education, advocacy and innovation, serving its members and assisting the dental community in fulfilling their responsibility to the public."*

We previously reported in this space some of the accomplishments of the CDA Foundation. As many members of the association know, the Foundation, as well as TDIC and 1201, entities that were formerly considered "subsidiaries" of CDA, have been integrated into the organizational structure of CDA. Every function in which the Foundation engages is now linked to the association's Strategic Plan and Goals.

The CDA Foundation Mission is *"Improving the health of Californians by promoting total health, disease prevention, risk assessment, and treatment of oral health-related diseases through strategic partnerships with allied organizations."* Specific purposes include, *"To improve the health of Californians by linking the dental profession to community needs,"* and *"To collaborate with public and private organizations and leverage partner funding, expertise, and knowledge."*

The latter purpose is clarified by one of its long-range goals. *"To be a credible, unbiased health organization working with key philanthropic and private organizations to garner interest and leverage external (non-CDA) financial support for initiatives important to dentistry."* A good example of early success in achieving this goal is the First 5 Oral Health Initiative funding award to the Foundation that was previously mentioned in this column. The \$7 million grant is



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designed to provide training and education to dental and medical providers and consumers in the prevention of dental disease in children from birth to age 5.

Another way in which the dental profession will carry out its mission to influence the improvement of oral health care is through collaboration with other organizations. Here again, the CDA Foundation is at the center of an exciting new initiative now underway. A grant application is currently under development to the National Institute of Dental and Craniomandibular Research (NIDCR). It involves the five California dental schools as well as the new dental school in Nevada and the Nevada Dental Association. Referred to as the California/Nevada Clinical Research Collaborative (or Practice-Based Research Network), this will be a significant clinical research project in which California and Nevada dental practitioners (not dental faculty) will engage. The role of schools and faculty will be to provide consultation on project protocols and design.

Whether or not the grant is funded by NIDCR, it will be administered or coordinated by the CDA Foundation. If the NIDCR grant funding does not become available, there remains a strong commitment within the association to develop or leverage other sources of funding in order that this first-of-a-kind clinical research project by the profession can be launched.

The Foundation has made a great deal of progress in a very short time. Based on the accomplishments to date, much more can be expected in the future. While Foundation initiatives and efforts to identify external funding partners are critical, support from within the profession is also vital to their success and to the image of the profession. Thus, support from within the profession is encouraged.

Those who may have been critical of the time-intensive procedures of policy development by traditional standing councils of the

association will be pleased to know that the structure of the association, in line with the strategic plan has been changing. Groups of individuals with expertise in the policy areas of concern are now being appointed to make timely decisions. Two task forces are currently in place. One is charged with bringing the Code of Ethics up to contemporary standards and make it more user friendly, and those who have been regularly reading the association publications should be well aware of the issues and concerns confronting the Task Force on Licensure. A Policy Development Council and a Government Affairs Council that will combine and replace five existing councils are under development with final approval to come at the 2004 House of Delegates. An important objective of these groups is to consider important public policy issues in a timely fashion.

The product of the described activities and accomplishments (and many others that would form a list too lengthy to include here) is a membership association that is well positioned "to make a difference" on programs and issues important to dentists and the future of the dental profession here in California. Association structure (and staffing) has been streamlined; there is excellent staff and volunteer leadership, and a good financial support base. Others in the profession outside of California will be watching CDA efforts closely to consider similar initiatives to advance dentistry in their states or districts.

Some volunteer leaders have expressed criticism that the implementation of CDA's Applied Strategic Plan has been slow to kick in. To this observer, recent developments, as well as recent decisions by the Board of Trustees, confirm that a "new" CDA has indeed been launched and that the year 2004 is without question, a *time of progress!*

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