

Full Circle

STEVEN A. GOLD, DDS

How does a professional association of 24,000 individuals listen to members' concerns, decide on the best course of action to simultaneously address those concerns and fulfill its professional obligations, and then implement a plan to get results?

Imagine such an organization where all 24,000 individuals have the power to make positive changes in both that organization and their profession. In the business world, this would be unimaginable. In dentistry, and within CDA, it is happening right now.

At the August 2008 CDA Board of Trustees meeting, attendees participated in a discussion called "Knowledge-based Decision Making," an exercise designed to incorporate information and insight into future policy decisions of the association. All meeting attendees, trustees, officers, council and committee chairs, staff, and guests were divided into small groups to facilitate input from everyone.

The highlights of these very lively discussions were then reported back to the group at large and this information will be used to give direction to the association. The process has been used several times over the past few years and allows the association to be actively involved in shaping the future of the profession, not just reacting to events as they happen. It is important to understand this process because it lends credibility to the association's eventual position on the important issues discussed.



So what does this mean for the average member? It demonstrates the power you have in organized dentistry.

And just what are those issues? At this meeting, they were no less than the role of the dentist in the overall health of patients, the scope of dental practice, and the relevance and responsiveness of dental education to emerging dental science and technology. And that was just scratching the surface. The discussion and search for answers began, as often does, with questions. These questions came directly from some of you, the CDA membership. They dealt with the use of botox and sleep apnea appliances in clinical dental settings. Are they legal? Are they appropriate? What role should CDA play in the development of policy around these issues? There is much work to be done in these areas but the discussions that occurred at the August board meeting will serve as a starting place.

So what does this mean for the average member? It demonstrates the power you have in organized dentistry. It shows that reports and questions to CDA from members are, in fact, brought before the association's leadership and discussed in terms of how the dental profession should respond given its many interests and responsibilities. The information will be given to staff where they will apply

their expertise in policy development and come back to leadership with recommendations for action. The recommendations will be discussed further by leadership ultimately leading to a decision made by the Board of Trustees.

The issues will subsequently be forwarded to the House of Delegates for final approval. It is a process that begins and ends with the membership of this association and it demonstrates that input from individual members will eventually make its way into action. Because of this, members should continue to voice their professional concerns to the association either through the member contact center or their component's leaders.

For those who want to go a step further, they could become actively involved in leadership and be part of the group that starts the conversation and ultimately makes the decisions. It is a great way to see the flow of ideas come full circle back to the members and to realize the power and responsibility each member has to help shape the practice of dentistry. ■■■■

Address comments, letters, and questions to the editor at alan.felsenfeld@cda.org.