

Working Together to Benefit All

Following is the text of Dr. Finney's outgoing president's speech to the 2004 House of Delegates, given Nov. 19.

Congratulations CDA! What an outstanding year it has been. The activities depicted in the "2004 Year in Review" presentation are just the highlights. You are the leaders of this association, and you determine the policy and the direction CDA will follow. Together, we determine the course of the largest state dental association in the country.

Early this year CDA membership reached 20,000. Our association alone makes up over 13 percent of the ADA membership. That means we have a significant voice, and it also means we have a vital role in determining the future of our profession. Each CDA delegate represents approximately 100 member dentists. What an important responsibility and what a tremendous opportunity that is. Each time you vote, you are speaking for 100 dentists. The decisions we make at this meeting will have an impact nationally on the direction of issues such as licensure, access to care and diversity representation.

Last year I spoke about my dream of "Uniting Our Community." A dream like Martin Luther King, Jr., had where we all work together toward a common goal to benefit all. Our goal should be to preserve the standards of education and delivery of care, and to provide oral health care to as many as possible. Or to quote from our vision statement, "The organization embodies a spirit of respect, synergistic cooperation and commitment. ...CDA promotes the health of the public, the profession and the individuals it serves."

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ceeded my hopes and dreams, and I thank all of you for your contributions. This year, the Dental Forum has grown and expanded its role; CDA leaders have partnered with leaders of other states; we have enhanced our relationship with the ADA leadership, staff, and with leaders of our allied dental health associations. We have many examples of the power of consensus and cooperation such as the passage of SB 1546 which will expand the scope of dental assisting, the work on changes to the licensure process, and future meetings planned with leaders of other states.

We have made significant progress this year on all nine goals of our strategic plan. We certainly have increased recognition and respect in the legislative arena. We have proposals before us to further streamline our governance structure and ensure that we have the expertise we need. Not to mention, a huge undertaking, the review and revision of the Bylaws. Our CDA family of companies has increasingly functioned like a family. We have gained important information about the relationship between CDA and our component dental societies through the work of the Goal 9 Task Force.

We have much to celebrate and much to be thankful for. First, please thank your dedicated team of volunteers on the Executive Committee. I have been truly blessed with the opportunity to work closely with such devoted individuals. Also, please thank your trustees and council, committee, subsidiary board, and task force chairs for their time and dedication.

Perhaps our greatest gift and resource is our CDA staff. They are our partners, our researchers and our support. I thank them all



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for their commitment and assistance. I have had an opportunity to meet and work with many wonderful people this past year. It is the people who I will remember most and miss the most. I thank you for the memories and the privilege and honor to serve in this position.

I wish it were possible to share with you all that I have learned this year. Through countless meetings, discussions, presentations and volumes of reading, I have gained greater insight into the challenges facing dentistry. Jim Bramson, executive director of the ADA, said "What leaders really do is to help organizations see change, prepare them for the journey ahead, and help them struggle through it." That is perhaps the most difficult task of being a leader, especially under our current system of government. Here we are at the end of the year, trying to educate you in a very short period of time about the changes we have determined are necessary.

I understand how difficult it is for you as delegates to grasp the need and the importance for some of the proposals before you. You question the emphasis on changes to the licensure process and the need for greater freedom of movement. When you see dentists opening practices all around you, it is difficult to appreciate the concern about the lack of access to care. You wonder how these things will affect you, the CDA member, in your practice. I know and I understand because I have asked the same questions.

Yet, we have the Surgeon General's report on oral health care, which outlines the epidemic nature of dental disease and the disparities of oral health care. We have studies that report 20 percent of California communities, representing 4 million people, have a shortage of dental providers. Last year, the ADA appointed a task force to help study and solve the access problems for 80,000 people in remote communities in Alaska. At the ADA House of Delegates last month, more than 400 dentists signed up to vol-

unteer in Alaska. If they will go to the "Last Frontier" perhaps they would come to the "Golden State" where we have 11 million people without access to routine dental care. That is why we need to have freedom of movement for dental professionals in this country. We should accept a dental license from any state when a dentist volunteers to work in an underserved area. When we go to a foreign country to deliver dental care, whether it's just over a border or halfway around the world, they don't care where or how we are licensed.

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We have heard from the California deans and dental students that change is imperative in the licensure process. Last year, the CDA House of Delegates approved the appointment of a task force to continue to work on models of licensure on graduation and the elimination of live-patient testing. You have proposals before you that will take us the next step toward those goals and increase freedom of movement.

I believe these two areas — licensure and access to care — are the overarching issues facing the dental profession today. Our schools cannot train enough dentists to take care of the need for oral care in this country. The high cost of dental education limits practice alternatives for many. We will have to utilize alternative workforce models and rely on freedom of movement. The ADA under the leadership of president Richard Haught has published a white paper on access to care, including examples of programs that have made a difference in several states. In addition, Dr. Haught has ap-

pointed a task force to study workforce models in healthcare. According to Dr. Ed O'Neil, director of the UCSF Center for the Health Professions, "The dentistry profession must ask itself whether it wants to be the leadership profession for the nation's oral health concerns, or the leadership profession for bungalow solo private practices in the nation's suburbs. If it is the latter, then the profession can continue on its current pathway, and resign itself to serve less of the overall oral health care needs for the nation. If it wants to pursue the former, the pathway is less clear but far more important. The profession must turn its enormous energy and talent to creating new ways of organizing and delivering oral health care." Dr. O'Neil will be working with us on the "Mapping the Future" project, which will help us to identify areas of future need and to develop potential solutions.

It is important to recognize that change will happen with or without us. Dentistry has an opportunity to lead the change we want to see and the responsibility to preserve standards of education and delivery of care. At the same time, we must be open to designing and initiating alternative models. If we don't accept this challenge, we will not be included in decisions that will significantly alter the delivery of oral health care.

Change involves risk, but if we don't change, we will risk even more. Change requires courage, not the absence of fear, but the commitment to act in spite of fear. The change that is needed will require great vision, the shared vision of the entire dental community for "shared vision is the single most important factor in building bridges to the future." Let's continue to unite our community and lead the challenge for our profession.

I thank you again for the gift of your confidence, your trust, and your support. I leave you with one of my favorite quotes from Albert Einstein, "I want to know God's thoughts — the rest are details."

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