

Wellspring – Inaugural Issue, January 2009

Nova Scotia's Dentists Connect with Leaders and Policy Makers

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Wellspring*, an e-bulletin published by the Nova Scotia Dental Association on behalf of the province's dentists.

Dentists are the leaders in providing oral health care to Nova Scotians. Each year there are over 1.5 million patient visits to dentist offices across the province. Dentistry has a direct economic impact estimated at \$250 million annually and the profession employs over 1,500 people from licensed professionals to support staff.

Perhaps the biggest contribution dentists make is in providing high-quality oral health care so that Nova Scotians can gain and maintain optimal oral health; and in turn be productive, healthy members of society.

Wellspring will be issued 3-4 times a year and distributed to many of Nova Scotia's provincial, municipal and federal government leaders and policy makers to provide awareness of the successes, issues and contributions of dentistry. For more information, please visit www.nsdental.org or call the NSDA at (902) 420 0088.

Gauging Aging Population Needs

Statistics Canada says seniors will account for one in every four Canadians by 2036. By 2056, the senior population will almost double to over 12 million across the country. In Nova Scotia the impacts of these trends will be felt over the next few decades as well. A study being conducted by NSDA member, Dr. Debora Matthews and colleagues at Dalhousie University's Faculty of Dentistry seeks to understand the oral health status and needs of aging and senior Nova Scotians.

This study will provide detailed information about the current oral health of the province's seniors. Currently there is no baseline data, either provincially or nationally on seniors' oral health, and that's what makes this research so important. Results will be used to direct planning and advise governments on public policy creation to support future oral health care.

A pilot study conducted between 2004-2006 included interviews and clinical exams of 150 seniors and provided some interesting initial results: Fully 90% of seniors spent out of pocket money for their care (75% had no dental insurance); 17% said pain was 'normal'; 29% had severe periodontitis (gum disease affecting

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the bone supporting the teeth); and 55% reported seeing a dentist, dental hygienist or denturist in the previous year.

The full study, being conducted now, will target 1,200 Nova Scotians in three distinct age groups: 45-64, 65+ living in the community and 65+ living in extended healthcare institutions. Again, through a combination of interviews and clinical screenings, the research will explore four main measures: the impact of oral health on the quality of life; utilization of oral health services; oral health status; and treatment needs.

Dalhousie researchers expect the study to take 18 months to complete with results available in early 2010.

Dentistry and Government Work Positively towards Dental Hygiene Legislation

The passing of legislation enabling self-licensing and self-regulation of dental hygienists during the Fall 2007 sitting of the Nova Scotia Legislature marked the successful conclusion of several years of collaborative discussions among government, dentists and dental hygienists. The final regulations are now nearing completion.

The main goal, from the NSDA perspective, was to ensure that any legislative changes were made with patient safety at the forefront. While there will be significant changes from a regulatory perspective for hygienists, the legislation will create little change from a patient care perspective for the most part.

Oral health care delivery in Nova Scotia is a team effort between dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants and support staff. Most patients access and receive treatment in dentist owned and operated clinics and offices. The legislation makes it possible for dental hygiene services to be provided by independent dental hygienists and we are hopeful this will lead to increased access to care in the future.

Comprehensive oral health care, including hygiene services, continue to be available at dental offices across Nova Scotia.

Access to Care one of the NSDA's Priorities

While a majority of Nova Scotians make regular visits to their dentist for treatment and preventative care, there are segments of the population that are unable to do so. The NSDA recognizes the leadership role it can play in helping raise awareness and motivate action to facilitate access to underserved populations.

In 2006, the Association struck a committee to identify patient populations in Nova Scotia whose dental needs were not being fully met under existing structures. This group, comprised of volunteer dentists from across the province, was asked to identify both the underserved populations and perceived barriers to access for each.

This work has identified various populations of need; often with very different access issues. Physical limitations, lack of local specialized personnel and/or facilities and financial constraints were recurring themes. The NSDA is currently in the early stages of looking for ways and means to target specific populations to address their unique barriers to care.

Future issues of *Wellspring* will delve into various current public and professional oral health matters, including more on access to care.

Dr. Burton Conrod President of FDI World Dental Federation

Dr. Burton Conrod, a dentist practicing in Sydney, Cape Breton for over 30 years, was installed as President of FDI World Dental Federation in the Fall of 2007 for a two-year term. Dr. Conrod is the first Canadian to be elected to lead this prestigious international organization.

FDI is a federation of over 130 National Dental Associations and as such, its main roles are to advance the ethics, art, science and practice of dentistry; to represent nearly 1 million dentists worldwide; and to stimulate and facilitate the exchange of information across all borders with the goal of oral health for all peoples.

The Presidency will be a journey in many ways. Work will take Dr. Conrod to the four corners of the world and provide challenges and rewards on a global scale, as FDI routinely partners with the United Nations and the World Health Organization among others.

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The FDI Presidency follows decades of Dr. Conrod's involvement in organized dentistry which has seen him as President of both the Nova Scotia Dental Association and the Canadian Dental Association.

Did You Know?

- The NSDA was incorporated in 1891 and since its inception the Association has supported five generations of dentists.
- Today the NSDA has over 500 members. All licensed dentists in Nova Scotia are NSDA members.
- As a not-for-profit organization, the NSDA is the public policy representative for dentists in Nova Scotia.
- The Association's policy-making body is represented by dentists from across the province.
- The NSDA is a corporate member of the Canadian Dental Association.

Let Us Know what You Think

Wellspring (wɛlˈsprɪŋ) *n*: An origin; a source of continual supply. (*a wellspring of ideas*)

As its name implies, this e-bulletin aims to be the continuing source of information on dentistry and oral health matters in Nova Scotia. Let us know what you think of this new venture. Please contact us with any comments or questions you may have at nsda@eastlink.ca. If you choose not to receive subsequent issues of *Wellspring*, please use the "unsubscribe" link below.