



Royal College of  
Dental Surgeons of Ontario

*Ensuring Continued Trust*

# BULLETIN

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TO: ALL RCDSO MEMBERS

FROM: RCDSO COUNCIL

December 16, 2005

## COLLEGE REPLIES TO RECENT CONCERNS ABOUT ADVERTISING

At the end of November, the Ontario Dental Association sent out an *ODA Advantage* to all its members. It outlined a number of concerns that the ODA General Council and Board had about the College's advertising initiative. Regrettably this document may have contained some erroneous information. RCDSO Council believes it is important to get the facts straight.

### **Background**

The College has been discussing advertising for at least two years. This is not new. The College's decision to embark on this venture was done within the full view of the dentists of Ontario.

In 2003, both the President and the Registrar gave speeches to make members aware that the College was exploring alternate sources of funding, such as advertising, to keep any fee increase modest, and to a minimum. The process outlined was to assess and evaluate possibilities, with an effective launch date of 2006. Members were responsive and encouraging.

Beginning in late 2004, the President's Column in the October/November 2004 issue of *Dispatch* broached the idea that Council would be considering advertising in a limited way.

In November 2004, the President addressed this topic in his speech during an open meeting of the RCDSO Council. At that same meeting, By-law #11 was presented to Council and passed unanimously. ODA representatives were at that meeting.

This by-law clearly sets out our advertising and sponsorship policies to ensure that advertising does not, in any way, detract from our core principles of editorial independence and institutional integrity for our magazine, *Dispatch*. It ensures that nothing will be done to detract from the College's purpose, vision, and values. Advertising will not be accepted if it is in conflict with, or appears to violate, any RCDSO policy, the Code of Ethics, or College by-laws. Advertisements deemed offensive in either text or artwork, or that contain attacks of a personal, racial or religious nature, will not be accepted.

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The passage of the by-law was reported in the November 2004 issue of *Council Highlights* that was sent to all members, and the by-law was loaded on our Web site. (By-law #11 is on our Web site at [www.rcdso.org](http://www.rcdso.org).)

The President even spoke about our advertising initiative at ODA's General Assembly meeting in November 2004. In the summer 2005 issue of *Dispatch*, there was a one-page feature story on the Council's decision to embark on advertising. This feature highlighted By-law #11, detailed how it would work to protect the integrity of the College, and explained how the Advertising Review Committee would have the final say on all proposed advertising.

At no time during this two-year process was there a formal request from the ODA to voice its concerns. There was no request to make a formal deputation to Council, nor was there a request to meet, or any correspondence to express concerns about our endeavour, nor any calls to the President or to members of the Executive Committee.

#### **The ODA Says That We Have A Possible Conflict of Interest**

There is absolutely no conflict of interest, real or perceived, with the College engaging in advertising in *Dispatch*, or any other publication. There is nothing in our governing legislation that prevents us from doing this. In fact, RCDSO is following in the footsteps of a long list of other major regulatory colleges in the province, some in health care, some not; some large, some small.

We have the support of an overwhelming majority of members. Over 15% of members responded to the readership survey and completed the questionnaire. Our sales representative reports that the industry norm for response to such a survey is a 1 to 5% completion rate. Out of the 1,232 responses received to date, only 16 contained negative comments. Many more dentists took the time to express their support of the advertising initiative. Beyond the survey, we have received no specific letters of concern from members.

As for government, both politicians and bureaucrats, have never indicated, either formally or informally, any note of concern. Government representatives are always at our Council meetings, and receive *Dispatch*.

We have cleared this initiative with our outside legal counsel, and we are moving forward very cautiously.

#### **The ODA Says There Will Be A Negative Impact on Its Advertising Revenues**

At this point, there is no hard evidence to support the ODA's contention that advertising in *Dispatch* will negatively impact the ODA.

There are a number of publications in the marketplace, including *Oral Health* and the *Journal of the Canadian Dental Association*. The JCDA is also distributed to all dentists and dental students in the province, just like *Dispatch*.

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Each publication has its own unique set of strengths. We know that the ODA has a fine publication. In a free market economy, advertisers will no doubt continue to look on the *Ontario Dentist* favourably. In fact, there are ads that currently appear in the *Ontario Dentist* that are not eligible for inclusion in our magazine, as outlined in By-law #11.

#### **The ODA Suggests Members May Misinterpret Intent of Advertising**

The ODA says that some dentists and/or members of the public might perceive an advertisement of a specific product or service in *Dispatch* as an endorsement. This is not the case.

As outlined in By-law #11, advertising will be clearly distinguished from editorial copy in format and appearance. The types of acceptable advertising are defined clearly in the by-law, and the publication will carry the usual disclaimer, much like the one in *Ontario Dentist*. There are even limits on the amount of advertising allowed in each issue, so editorial copy will always predominate.

As By-law #11 states, decisions about what advertising is carried in *Dispatch* will be made by the Advertising Review Committee. All proposed advertising must be reviewed and accepted by this Committee, before it will be accepted for publication. The Committee members are the President, a public member of the Executive Committee, the Registrar, and the Communications Director.

#### **The ODA Suggests There Are Privacy Concerns About The Readership Survey**

The College has a Privacy Code that has been, and will continue to be followed. This Code has been filed with both the federal and provincial governments.

There was a very clear disclaimer on the front page of the survey. It stated: "Please note that all individual survey responses will be kept completely confidential. They will only be used to develop a readership profile for *Dispatch*. Your individual responses will **NOT** be shared with any third party."

Members were not required to identify themselves by name, and they could make a choice about adding their name to the detachable coupon to enter the draw for a digital camera.

#### **In Closing**

The College of today prides itself on its open and transparent decision-making process. It is no accident that our mission is "Ensuring Continued Trust." We take these words extremely seriously. As By-law #11 states: "The integrity and credibility of RCDSO and its members shall be the overriding consideration in all advertising and sponsorship activities." Your Council stands by those words.



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