

# Address given by the President of the General Dental Council

Professor N. H. F Wilson<sup>1</sup>

**At his first meeting as GDC President on the 8 November 1999, Professor Nairn Wilson paid generous tribute to his predecessor, Dame Margaret Seward, and set out his plans for the next five years. In particular he emphasised the importance of professional self-regulation and expressed his personal commitment to recertification for the dental profession and the statutory regulation of all members of the dental team.**

This meeting of Council heralds a new quinquennium spanning the last months of the twentieth century and the first four years of the new millennium. It is a singular honour to have the privilege to have been elected President of the Council for this period.

The beginning of a new quinquennium is a timely opportunity to reinforce key elements of service to the Council. Irrespective of the individuals or bodies who nominated, elected or appointed us, our primary purpose and responsibility as members of the Council, is to work together with its dedicated staff, as a united and focussed Council with the principal aim of protecting the interests of the public. To do otherwise would inevitably frustrate the necessary further development and substantial programme of ongoing and new business which the Council must effectively address during the next five years. Notwithstanding the ever-increasing expectations of the public, Government and the profession which must be met, we share a tremendous onus of responsibility to future generations of dentists and professionals complementary to dentistry (PCNs) who will wish to enjoy the privileges of professional self-regulation. We can leave no greater legacy than a strong, vibrant Council which has captured and nurtured the confidence of the public, Government, dentistry at large and related professions. To achieve this goal, the interests of patients must continue to be of paramount importance and properly safeguarded at all times.

The Council, together with other regulatory bodies will continue to be the subject of most careful scrutiny, notably in terms of the unacceptable possibility of members of the profession protecting their own. In this regard, the Council's adherence to its decisions and code of conduct, in particular the principles governing public service, must be resolute – an aspect of Council business which I will be particularly anxious to oversee during my presidency.

The items for discussion at this November meeting of the Council include: an implementation plan for the statutory registration of classes of professionals complementary to dentistry and the Council's Recertification Scheme. These items take forward business arising from the historic decisions taken by the Council at its May meeting this year. More importantly, these items will be central to the focus of the Council over the next five years. This focus will be the enhancement of the perception and effectiveness of the Council. Achieving this focus will demand the maintenance and, where necessary, the strengthening of the Council's uncompromising fitness to practise arrangements, excellence in matters pertaining to education and training, and clarity and coherence in issues which will lead to the maturation of the dental team.

Concerning the implementation plan for the statutory registration of classes of professionals complementary to dentistry, this strategic document demonstrates the Council's commitment to progress the arrangements to be the first Health Regulatory Body to assume responsibility to register all team members. Substantial progress has been made

through most helpful consultation with professionals complementary to dentistry organisations. Many issues, however, remain to be considered and approved. The proposed timetable for further action on this front is ambitious and assumes opportunity to amend the Dentist's Act through order-making powers. Those individuals and organisations with particular interest, commitments and enthusiasm to see implementation of the decision taken in respect of PCDs only five months ago, must be patient and understand the need for due process to effect the changes which will inevitably have a significant impact on the future delivery of oral health care. The Council will continue to direct considerable energies and resource in this direction.

On the matter of the Council's Recertification Scheme, this timely, top priority development will hopefully be viewed as the foundation for emerging arrangements for clinical governance in dentistry. This scheme, with the approval of the Council, will provide the majority of registered dentists engaged in the practice of dentistry with the means to have their many, varied and not atypically substantial existing activities in continuing professional development recognised and recorded. Apart from ensuring that all dentists on the Register will be subject to continuing professional development requirements, it is anticipated that the Scheme will have many indirect benefits, notably continuous quality improvement in the provision of postgraduate education.

Effective clinical governance is central to the national healthcare quality agenda. In this agenda clinical governance is underpinned by professional self-regulation and lifelong learning. I look forward to the Council contributing to this agenda through the strengthening of self-regulation and taking forward the Recertification Scheme as a platform on which to build robust lifelong learning. Assuming approval of the Recertification policy, the launch of the Recertification scheme is scheduled to take place as part of the Dentistry 2000 celebrations.

<sup>1</sup>Delivered at the meeting of the General Dental Council on Tuesday 9th November at 37 Wimpole Street, London.

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Another key agenda item for the Council is the Report of the Primary Qualifications Visitation Review Group which may be viewed as evolution of the existing process of visitations undertaken by the Council. The recommendations of the Primary Qualifications Review Group, which come to Council with the strong support of the Education and Policy and Resources Committee will substantially reinforce a fundamental function of the Council in fulfilling its responsibilities to ensure the sufficiency of primary dental qualifications in the UK. Through the recommendations to be considered and hopefully approved by Council today, the Dental Authorities will receive new direction in shouldering the enormous burden of annually transfusing the profession with suitably trained, enthusiastic new graduates who, within the short timespan of a generation, will inherit the responsibilities we discharge today. The future of dentistry is to a very large extent reliant on strong, effective dental schools, hospitals and postgraduate institutions as centres of excellence in education, training and research. The Council in recognising the importance of these institutions must

endeavour to facilitate their further development as world class centres of excellence in dentistry.

With the support of dedicated staff, the Council has the privilege of being the regulatory body for a most effective profession. Evidence of this effectiveness, as recently recognised by the Prime Minister, has been enhanced by the preliminary results of the latest Adult Dental Health Survey. The dramatic improvements in oral health and dental awareness since 1978, when the first UK Adult Dental Health Survey was carried out, have been little short of spectacular. Such achievement has been a team effort, and with ever increasing collaboration and concerted action in the future, it is to be hoped that progress on this front will show no evidence of slowing, with ever-increasing benefits to patients.

Subsequent to the publication in 1998 of the Council's revised ethical guidance

—*Maintaining Standards*— and the subsequent amendments to this excellent document, it could be assumed that the Council's ethical guidance and related fitness to practice arrangements require relatively little attention in the immediate future. In contrast, ongoing work will be required in this area to include the introduction of the Council's Performance Review Scheme and to formulate and seek amendments to the Dentists Act to extend the options for the outcome of Conduct and Health Committee deliberations.

We have today taken leave of an exceptional President in Dame Margaret Seward. The tributes to her, whilst fulsome and heartfelt, cannot do her justice. We also owe an enormous debt to Professor Gordon Seward for his role throughout the last five years. I am indeed honoured to follow Dame Margaret — a most distinguished President of the Council.