

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

Alasdair G. Miller

My year as President of the Association comes to an end very shortly. What an amazing year I have had. What an honour it has been to serve as your President. The year has certainly lived up to that often quoted Chinese Proverb 'May you live in interesting times'.

I thought I might review the year by exploring the role in terms of the following perspectives: international, national and the future.

International

I have had the privilege of attending various international conferences. I thought I would share a few things from them with you:

At the American Dental Association (ADA) held in San Antonio in Texas, George W. Bush was a keynote speaker spending an hour in a question and answer session. He was very insightful, especially over 9-11 and how he handled the immediate aftermath. He was self-deprecating and witty, not what I had expected based on how our media treated him. I met the Canadian Dental Association delegation including their President-elect Alistair Nicoll, who hails from Britain and graduated from my alma mater Bristol. I asked the President of the ADA what was their greatest challenge, he replied that it was getting younger members involved with the work of the Association. So there are some similarities there.

In Porto in Portugal at the Portuguese Dental Association Conference, we heard about dentistry in Portugal, Spain and France from each of their Presidents, as well as the staff of the Council for Dentistry in Europe. I presented the state of dentistry in the UK. All of us have similar challenges but the funding of care is different. The

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Council of European Dentists' staff spoke very highly of the BDA, especially in respect to the work of Susie Sanderson and Stuart Johnston on the Minamata Charter. The gradual phase down of the use of dental amalgam in the world, rather than an outright ban, was down to their hard work and this is still work in hand. The BDA is highly regarded internationally for its pragmatic approach and sense of fair play.

This spring I was fortunate enough to attend both the Pacific Dental Congress in Vancouver and the Australian Dental Conference in Brisbane. I discovered a few things we all have in common, how to engage with the younger members of the profession, the over-supply of dentists in major cities, the difficulty of getting dentists to work in rural areas and the effects of corporate dentistry. There was certainly a wish to share ideas between the associations and an enthusiasm for the BDA's contribution to the Federation Dentaire International.

National

It has been an interesting year. I am pleased to say the Principal Executive Committee has achieved a great deal and the Association is in a healthy position to support its members.

It has been a privilege to watch the Principal Executive Committee at work and be copied in on the emails; and believe you me there are many. Firstly, how they tackled the Department of Health over the proposed cut in DF salaries and won. Then having to take on the General Dental Council over the annual retention fee consultation and being left no choice but to demand a judicial review. You all know the result. I have been impressed with how hard they worked, especially this spring looking at the future strategic direction for the Association. Strategy is something most people find difficult. Henry Mintzberg – a leading professor of business studies said 'strategy is like shovelling jelly'. I couldn't work out what flavour our jelly is but they did a good job shaping it.

It has also been gratifying to see how the theme of my predecessor Dr Barry McGonigle on trying to raise awareness of sugar and its effects on teeth and general health has received national attention this past year.

The BDA has taken a leading

role in reducing the prescribing of antibiotics, firstly by hosting a very successful multi-professional study day on antimicrobial prescribing and then supporting the Antibiotic Guardian programme.

I have attended many branch and section events around the country and was impressed with the enthusiasm for the profession, the hard work of the committee members and touched by their generous hospitality.

The future

Sadly, I don't think the future is going to get any easier for the profession or the Association. There is likely to be continued fiscal pressure on NHS budgets. This will impact on all parts of the profession. There is very slow progress in revising and hopefully improving the NHS dental contract in England. The good news is that I know caring, gifted dentists will always be in demand and that as the economy improves, patients may wish to access more of their services.

The Association I know will continue to contribute to international and national debates on behalf of the profession. At a local level I know we have many very active branches and sections who will, through the hard work of their committee members, organise many CPD and social events which keeps the Association alive at a local level.

I am certain that with Nairn Wilson succeeding me as President, the Association will have a very great ambassador. I first met Nairn when I invited him to be the keynote speaker at a Western Counties Branch Presidential Meeting in Salcombe in 1986. He gave a fascinating presentation on the relatively new world of light-cured composites. Nairn was then a lecturer in Manchester and I was a general practitioner in Taunton. His skill as a communicator and educator was obvious then. I doubt though either of us would have imagined we would both be asked to be Presidents of the Association. I am certain through his national and international contacts he will raise the profile wherever he travels.

Finally, I would like to finish by thanking a person without whose help, diplomacy and organisational skills my year would not have run so smoothly or been so enjoyable, Alison Magee. Thank you so much for all your help and support.