

# The benefits of being connected

The IDA has had a long involvement with the Council of European Dentists and the *Fédération Dentaire Internationale*.

IDA members often ask me: "What exactly are the CED and the FDI?", "What do you do there?" and "What advantage do they have for the IDA"? I would like to try and explain a little background about each organisation, how and why they operate, and why membership and representation is of such importance and value to the IDA, and therefore to Irish dentists.

## Council of European Dentists

The Council of European Dentists (CED) is a not-for-profit association founded in 1961 and now composed of 32 member associations from 30 countries. Its objective is: to develop policy and strategies at EU level to preserve and promote high standards in the profession and the provision of quality dental care and health promotion; and, to monitor and influence political and legal developments that affect the profession and patients within the EU.

## World Dental Federation

The *Fédération Dentaire Internationale* (FDI) is the world representative body for over one million dentists. There are 200 national dental associations represented, from 130 countries. It seeks to encourage participation from all countries and for those countries with financial constraints, support from wealthier member organisations is permitted and welcomed. It is a forum for knowledge exchange among the international dental community, with a common aim to advance the science and practice of dentistry. Its overall vision is to achieve global oral health for all, with access to quality care and prevention. It promotes this through educational initiatives, engagement with governments and many other international organisations and stakeholders (WHO, UN, etc.) to advocate, influence and lead on policies that recognise oral health as a crucial element of general health and well-being.

## Work and collaboration

Both organisations are based in Europe – the CED in Brussels at the heart of the EU, and the FDI in Geneva, at the heart of world health organisations.

Both organisations are structured similarly to our own Association, with a small core office and management team, a board of directors, a council, and various working groups and task forces. The council, working groups/committees and task forces

are made up of dentists from the member dental associations, with expertise and enthusiasm relevant to the committee. These are voluntary positions.

The CED, being primarily focused on analysing and influencing legislation around dentistry in the EU, encourages active lobbying of political representatives when appropriate. The policy officers carry out frequent information gathering in order to stay fully updated on each national association's position on various issues, and to gain insights into how legislation affecting dentistry is implemented across the member states. This information is shared with members, both in frequent written updates and at the biannual general meetings. It is a hugely valuable resource for national associations to be kept informed of exactly how issues are being dealt with across the EU, and an early warning system and flagging of challenges and legislative changes that may be coming down the line. There are currently five CED Working Groups (WGs): Education and Professional Qualifications; E-Health; Dental Materials and Medical Devices; Patient Safety, Infection Control and Waste Management; and, Oral Health. There are also task forces on antimicrobial resistance, communications and the EU internal market. Prior to the implementation of the Minamata Convention, amalgam had its own WG.

The FDI's focus is broader and spans all the big issues in oral health: oral diseases; education; prevention; non-communicable diseases (NCDs); general health; the dental team; and, interprofessional collaboration. It must be appreciated that the resources, needs and priorities of dental associations from around the world vary dramatically, and there is a huge element of support from well-established associations and members for those countries where needs are great and resources limited. The working committees at the FDI are composed of: Dental Practice; Membership Liaison and Support; Public Health; Education; and, Science. The council and committee members are elected by popular vote at the General Assembly each year, with elected members serving a three-year term.

## Active associations

Each year considerable work goes into preparing and publishing FDI policy statements on issues of current interest and debate. These are initially formulated by the relevant committee, and sent to each national association for review and comments, before being debated again at the General Assembly and finalised. This ensures that each statement is a genuinely collaborative global dental opinion. They are also excellent resources for national dental associations when it comes to preparing policy statements to share with decision makers, the dental profession, opinion formers, and the general public.

CED general meetings take place twice yearly, although working groups will have regular teleconferences and updates, and surveys are sent out frequently. The FDI holds an annual general meeting – the World Dental Parliament – which takes place over three days prior to the FDI World Dental Congress.

## A fresh look

Both the CED and the FDI offer enormous potential for networking and the exchange of ideas with other international associations. Informal contacts outside of formal meetings can be invaluable. The discussions at social events and over coffee breaks are often when the most valuable personal contacts are made. These contacts contribute enduring value for the IDA; personal contacts are a huge resource of information and assistance on myriad topics, and are, in our experience, extremely generous with their time, expertise and information. They



Nuala Carney  
BA, BDentSc, FFD(RCSI), LLM(Cardiff)





*Drs Robin Foyle and Jane Renehan represent the Irish profession at the CED.*

provide a fresh way of looking at things, often new ideas, new inspiration, practical and current insights into practice and policy in other countries and jurisdictions, and sometimes the voice of experience regarding challenges facing us.

It would be impossible for the small staff at the IDA to remain informed about EU legislation at the level required for our Association's members without our participation in the CED. (Britain may wish to leave the EU, but the British Dental Association (BDA) is very keen to remain involved in the CED as it is such a valuable professional resource.) The staff in Brussels are all multilingual, with legal backgrounds and significant experience in analysing and reporting on EU legislation, drafting position papers and proposals, and providing well-informed advice where necessary to national associations. It provides us with access to the key dental representatives in other EU countries and accurate insights into how current issues affect dentists around the EU.

### Burning issues

Topics of importance (and often controversy) in the recent past have included the scope of practice of the dental team, recognition of qualifications and specialisations, standardisation of health services provision, legality of tooth whitening, accreditation of dental training, amalgam phase-down, corporate dentistry, antimicrobial resistance, and water treatment regulations, among many others. The topic of medical devices, now a national news item here, has been on our radar for some time and is of crucial importance for dentists. We are extremely privileged (and grateful) that Dr Jane Renehan is now chairing the CED WG on this topic, a huge service to Irish and EU members in terms of the level of expertise and commitment she has already brought to the Group.

FDI membership fosters relationships with associations further afield, specifically the New Zealand, Australian, Canadian, American and South African dental associations. This has resulted in a beneficial exchange of ideas and information. It has been particularly interesting to liaise with the NZDA, whose membership, population and delivery of practice are so similar to our own. We have established excellent links with the Canadian, American and Australian representatives. Irish members now have access, at no cost, to both the *Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA)* and the *International Dental Journal* (published by the FDI). Please contact IDA House if you would like to access the complete *International Dental Journal* online.



*The early birds – Dr Nuala Carney and Mr Fintan Hourihan ready for action.*

### The IDA team

The team that represents the IDA internationally is Drs Robin Foyle, Jane Renehan and Nuala Carney, and Mr Fintan Hourihan. The team reports directly to IDA Council, and submits regular written and oral reports. Each member of the team has become actively involved in sharing their expertise and contributing to the workload, all being members of WGs at CED. Jane is currently Chair of the WG on Dental Materials and Medical Devices and has been doing enormous work in this area for several years, recently liaising with the Health Products Regulatory Authority (formerly Irish Medicines Board) regarding medical devices and the impacts on dentists. Robin has worked actively on the Tooth Whitening WG since its inception, resulting in the recent adoption of a policy that we hope will allow tooth-whitening products (TWPs) to be made available for specified suitable under-18-year-old patients. Fintan is an active member of the Oral Health WG and has been responsible for encouraging the support and awareness of Irish MEPs around issues related to oral health. He successfully persuaded them to host meetings on 'Ageing and Oral Health', 'Mouth Cancer Awareness', and 'Health Inequalities and Integrated Care and Oral Health', at which Dr Anne Twomey and Dr Conor McAlister from the IDA made powerful presentations.

I have recently joined the WG on Education and Professional Qualifications. In previous years at the FDI, I made a presentation on behalf of the IDA at the FDI General Assembly, served on its Budget Reference Committee, and I hope to stand for election to the Dental Practice Committee at the FDI in the near future.

The benefits of membership of both organisations are varied and ongoing. Your representatives spend many hours working away quietly at their briefs and liaising with their counterparts abroad. We are part of an increasingly interconnected global dental world, and the challenges we face in Ireland are similar to those faced by dentists in other countries, particularly our European counterparts. We cannot afford to be isolated, and now more than ever our commitment to engagement both at EU and world dental forums is essential in order to be involved in leadership and the progression of our profession.

### Relevant websites

<https://cedentists.eu/>

<https://www.fdiworlddental.org/>

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/1875595x>