Valedictory Address

IDA AGM

RCSI, 18th April 2024

Members, Colleagues and Friends,

It is now my office to address the year that was; a busy year with lots done and with lots to more to do.

The first task I set myself last year was to understand what we should bring with us from the past. At the outset, it is an honour to hold the office of President of this illustrious Association and, in doing so, I had the pleasure of sharing our Centenary Year with Caroline. Together, we celebrated our Centenary Year while reinvigorating the values of our founders to represent, advocate and educate. Seldom has our Association had an advocate as skilled as Caroline.

Friendship was another core value to uphold. My engagements with colleagues in the Northern Ireland branch of the British Dental Association and within the British Dental Association itself have been amongst the most enjoyable and memorable moments in the past year. Reciprocity is a strength in our friendship and never is this more evident than the BDA’s decision to award our CEO, Fintan, its Roll of Distinction for multiple reasons but above all, for his leadership and friendship and his support during the pandemic.

The second task I set myself last year was to understand what are our members’ needs are today. A large bank of work was the very significant changes in professionalising the operation of the Board or Management Committee, striving towards best practice standards. This has resulted in a clearer delineation of tasks that are the responsibility of the Management Committee and devolution of tasks to the Executive Team. It has brought into sharp focus the responsibilities expected of each member of the Management Committee and Executive Team accentuating areas for change. This process is evolutionary and must continue into the future to achieve best practice. Change always has its challenges and so it’s important to acknowledge the manner in which the officers and directors of the Management Committee surveyed the changing landscape, and, once satisfied, committed to their tasks, pushing the changes forward. A special thank you to Caroline, Geraldine, Mairead, Ronan, Rory, Siobhan and Will. I’m sure the rest will understand if I make particular mention of Geraldine, and Ronan (our two indeoendent non-ece directots) and Will, our Honorary Treasurer, because of the amount of time and effort they expended in helping to develop best practice standards.

Devolution of tasks brought the role of the Executive Team into the spotlight. Never a totally comfortable place to be no matter how good you are. I would like to thank every member of the Executive Team for the work done, day-in, day-out, to forward the business and to promote the mission of the Association, the two Aoife’s, Cindy, Elaine, Fintan, Irina, Liz and Roisin. Again, I would like to express particular gratitude to Elaine, Fintan and Roisin for their support and guidance I might say over the past two years but, in reality, it has been much longer than that. Always willing to listen, to counsel with wisdom and kindness and then to help; I have been very fortunate. Thank you.

Membership was a concern I mentioned last year. Considerable time and effort have been expended to understand how we remain relevant to all cohorts of registered dentists in Ireland. The health of the Regional Branches is intrinsically linked to engagement with all our members. I know this will be a major theme of Rory’s year so he is best placed to talk on the matter. I thank all members of the Council and our Regional Committees for the work they do on behalf of the Association. It is so often unseen but without their effort the Association would become a pale imitation of what we all want it to be.

The third strand I set myself last year was to open a discussion on our future. The publication of our position paper on sustainable oral healthcare is a vision for the future. Fortuitously, its publication is aligned with the advent of a new Oral Health Unit in the Department of Health. Is this a sign of hope for the future? I don’t know but I am certain that all stakeholders must shed the failed practices of the past if we are to succeed in delivering sustainable oral healthcare in the 21st Century. I would like to thank everyone involved in putting the position paper together, especially the very patient people in Finn Partners, our public relations and public affairs advisers, . It will be for our Negotiating Teams to continue to work with the Departments, the HSE and others. This has always been a difficult task but the recent interactions with the Department of Social Protection showed the huge frustrations and difficulties we can face in dealing with officials who clearly do not value urgency or understand the pressures faced by dentists. Thank you to our Negotiating Teams for being prepared, professional and persistent. We made progress in securing an annual fees review but we need to keep the pressure on in the years ahead.

My penultimate task is to thank all of you, our members. Your loyalty and engagement are the beating heart of our Association. As we face into the future the importance of strength in numbers and unity of voice and purpose cannot be exaggerated. I invite you all not only to be a member but to encourage colleagues to join. Perhaps you might join us at committee level and represent the views of your friends and colleagues and, in turn, promote the values of our proud profession and Association?

Finally, it's time to hand over the chain of office to Rory. We are so lucky to have someone of Rory’s calibre to step into the role. I have already witnessed his energy and enthusiasm for the tasks that lie ahead of him. Something tells me that the Association will not only be in great hands but Rory will set a benchmark for future Presidents.

Rory, I am looking forward to working with you. I wish you the very best in your Presidential year. May it be everything you hope for.