

## **OHA Annual General Meeting - October 2nd, 2011 President's Report**

I would like to start by thanking my fellow members of the OHA Board of Directors for their dedication and hard work over this past year. We have been lucky to have a full board of seven members, and as a result, we have managed to achieve some major steps forward. I can't begin to express how much their participation and support has meant to me, and how much the OHA has gained as a result of their enthusiasm.

A special thanks to Joanne Watson who took over from Betty Donald this year as Treasurer and Secretary. Betty has moved to the West coast and, although she has continued to provide input to board decisions, has been understandably increasingly more involved in her new life. Joanne has done an excellent job of writing minutes for our meetings and keeping our financial and membership records accurate, despite a steep learning curve.

### **Volunteers**

Other volunteers who have labored behind the scenes are Jennifer Potruff dealing with OHA emails (and if the OHA email is anything like my email, she has my sincere sympathy), and Christina Lamont who has been answering the OHA phone messages. My thanks to both of them.

Our media representatives this past year have been Nancy Winlove-Smith and Kathleen Leeson. Nancy had to step down a couple of months ago, so I want to express our thanks that Kathleen is willing to take on this role for all of Ontario for the present.

I also want to thank Graham Butler for producing our professional newsletters. Although recent personal problems have delayed the latest issue, we will endeavor to get an update out to our membership in the very near future.

Correne Omland continues to update our Face book fan page with content help from Graham Butler. They have managed to get us up to 141 fans, and I would like to see some OHA resources being put into helping interest in the fan page grow this year.

### **Political**

I am not going to attempt to describe the current political situation for herbalists at all levels of government, but many volunteer hours have gone into monitoring and responding to various challenges. In all cases, the membership will be informed as soon as any concrete information is obtained.

Both the CCHA and the OHA continue to monitor legislative changes at the federal level, together with moves by Health Canada to enforce existing legislation regarding NHP and EN numbers for all products sold commercially.

The provincial government is still not actively pursuing regulation for herbalists, however other groups in the province are starting to be active on this issue, and it will require considerable work by the board in the coming year to ensure we are included (or at least not affected) by anything which occurs.

One item which should be mentioned here is the recent concern that Homeopaths would select the abbreviated title of RH for their college registration designation. We are pleased to report that they have selected RHP (Registered Homeopathic Practitioner), which we feel will greatly benefit the public in reducing confusion between practitioners.

Toronto Licensing and Standards have proposed the possible elimination of the Toronto holistic license. The process is not achieving it's original intent, with many holistic licenses being held by non-health care establishments. The OHA has attended meetings, and is supporting the elimination of this license, as we feel it is an unreasonable burden for herbalists wishing to practice in Toronto. We will keep you informed as this develops.

### **Canadian Council of Herbalists Associations**

As just mentioned, the CCHA have continued to provide Canada-wide representation of herbal associations to the federal government. They continue to have annual meetings with Health Canada, which ensures our visibility at a federal level and helps the NHPD better understand herbalism.

The CCHA have also undertaken a review of all of the policies and codes of the various associations, to see if it is possible to harmonize them. This would help to promote a common understanding of herbalism across Canada, and is something the OHA certainly supports. We will look forward to their recommendations.

The OHA representatives to the CCHA over the past few years have been Rick DeSylva and Michael Vertolli. They have done an excellent job of protecting our interests, especially during the original formulation of the NHPD policies. Rick stepped down last year in order to pursue other political goals, and Michael would like to step down in the next few months. As a result, a high priority for the next year will be finding and training new representatives.

### **Professional Members Committee**

Where do I start? The PMC has done a huge amount of work in the past year; ably chaired by Monika Ghent who keeps us all focused, and with minutes taken by Susan Elliotson. If you have ever attended a PMC meeting, you will understand how difficult those jobs can be, so my thanks to both of them for their commitment.

One of the most visible projects has been the creation of a new brochure designed to advertise professional herbalists and explain the elements of herbal medicine to the public. Copies were mailed to all professional members and were very well received. Additional copies will be mailed annually, and are available for purchase through the OHA at bulk printing rates.

The PMC also scripted and arranged the production of a 30 second radio advertisement. We

now have three slightly different versions which we will be looking to place on radio channels in the coming year. The ads focus on promoting professional herbalists, and the OHA as a reference source for locating one. We hope it will help define herbalists as separate from other CAM practitioners in the public perception. Members will be notified when the ads are likely to run, so there will be opportunity for feedback on our efforts.

Over the past several years, we have had comments both from OHA members and the public that our image is a little outdated, and the OHA web site fails to take advantage of the technological improvements of the past decade. As a result, we fail to attract and inform the wide range of people we would like to appeal to. The PMC took on the daunting task of identifying the essential OHA image we would like to retain, creating an image update proposal, and putting it out for tender. The board selected one of the proposals which were received, and the PMC will work with the designer to create a new and unique image for the OHA. The web site, brochures, membership certificates, newsletters, and all other communication tools used by the OHA will be included in that update as we progress, with the initial focus being the web site. We will keep everyone informed as this happens.

Other work completed by the PMC includes rewriting OHA entrance examinations to better include the diversity of herbal medicine. The new tests are still rigorous, but allow applicants to use herbs and techniques they are familiar with, without sacrificing the ability to assess safety and professionalism in practice.

### **Student Members Committee**

The creation of a Student Members Committee is an exciting step forward for the OHA. Katie Wolk, Correne Omland and Lindsay Bolger are spearheading this project, but a number of other student members are participating on a regular basis. The committee has had three meetings so far. They have established their protocols, helped the board redefine the student membership category, and made numerous suggestions for changes. In addition, they provided the technical expertise to automate our member survey (I'll talk more of that shortly).

We trust that the SMC will continue to provide valuable input to the growth of the OHA. It is essential that our students have the opportunity to be part of the evolution of professional herbal medicine in Ontario.

### **Events**

We started the year with a successful seminar 'Hands-On' - Clinical Testing. This seminar was well received, and we have had several requests to offer it again. It will be considered as a possibility for next fall.

Another significant event this spring was a co-sponsorship with the APND of a weekend seminar with Aviva Romm. My thanks to John Redden and Susan Elliotson for co-ordinating the event and making sure it was successful for the OHA. John and Susan had to work hard to ensure everything ran smoothly.

We held our annual professional and student member barbecue again this year. The weather was not very co-operative, but everyone who attended thoroughly enjoyed the event. Great thanks to Rick DeSylva who not only hosted the event, but who came close to drowning while barbecuing the chicken. I would have to say it was some of the best chicken I have ever had, so it was well worth the effort.

We did not attend any outside events this year, primarily due to a lack of volunteers to cover tables. However, we did have a literature presence at the Guelph Organic Conference. The Guelph conference has always been a good event for the OHA. Although we no longer have much success with the sale of memberships or merchandise, the OHA table always generated a lot of interest, so we are planning to attend this coming January, with the help of volunteers from our new Student Members Committee.

## **Journal**

At the beginning of this year, the OHA made strenuous efforts to find a workable solution for the Journal magazine. Printing, while popular, had become impossible to sustain financially. Attempts to find someone willing and able to run the Journal as a volunteer Managing Editor failed, and the board were forced to take a serious look at the value of the magazine in terms of the OHA's current objectives. It was decided that, as the Journal was primarily being sent to members, it was not fulfilling our mandate to inform and educate the public. Many factors played into the final decision, but free access to reputable articles through our web site seemed a way to reach a much wider audience. The decision was taken by the board to continue soliciting articles, and to scan and place previous Journal articles on the web site on a regular basis, with a complete archive system. More people will be drawn to the site, will increase their knowledge of herbal medicine, and hopefully will be encouraged to view Registered Herbalists as the true professionals in the field. The name of the Canadian Journal of Herbalism will be retained by the OHA, so our options are open for further developments in the future.

## **Administration**

Following the decision on the Journal, the membership categories were redefined, and new benefit lists and prices established. Professional and student memberships remain essentially unchanged, while general memberships have been redefined as nonvoting supporting members, with an appropriate reduction in price. We continue to work hard to improve the value of all levels of membership, and will be actively promoting memberships again now that each level has been clarified.

One of the first tasks we undertake each year is to update the corporation records. I am pleased to report that this has been completed and is accurate to this date.

We have also reviewed and approved an insurance company offering liability coverage for herbalists. This information is available on the web site for anyone who is interested.

Before she left, Betty Donald created a board manual which is now on the web site, and will be kept up to date as things change. This will help to ensure that information is not lost during

board transitions.

We finally managed to get all the old Journal magazines sorted out in the OHA locker. Two sets of the available issues have been set aside for the future OHA library, and the remainder sorted and boxed for future use.

Numerous volunteer hours have been, and continue to be, put into updating and correcting the OHA web site. Our focus is to ensure all of the information is correct and current. We have also added a number of guidance documents, including discussions of such issues as legal concerns, taxes, and an excellent document on wildcrafting created by Monika Ghent with the help of the PMC.

As part of our ongoing commitment to improving value for our members, the OHA board looked into group access to a number of web sites this year. However, we found that suitable sites were either already free, or the group access was prohibitively expensive. The exception that we were pleased to introduce was access for our professional and student members to the publication called GreenFiles. This is now available through the professional login on the web site and provides a quarterly summary of media and research information published on herbs, nutrients, and other complementary or alternative medicine information of interest to herbalists.

### **Financially**

I will leave this report to Joanne Watson, our Treasurer, but you will be pleased to know that the OHA is on a sound financial footing. We have managed to build our reserves to the point that important projects can be undertaken, including the image update already contracted, and looking at the possibility of hiring part time help to take the load off volunteers, and leave more hours for creative and progressive projects.

### **Member Survey**

Finally, I would like to share with you some of the results of the professional and student member survey which we undertook a couple of months ago. There were 40 respondents (75% being professional members, and 25% students), and not many surprises.

The most important factors in membership decisions were credibility, community, and receiving regular news updates. All of the activities the OHA is involved in are considered important, and nearly all respondents would like to see us increase our involvement in every area. The web site and newsletters are our most important communication tools.

One interesting finding is that a large percentage of responding members (45%) are unsure about regulation. It would be worthwhile project for the PMC to develop a discussion paper on the subject, to help members understand the underlying issues. Only 3 respondents were actively against regulation, although a further 20% could not support it but felt it to be inevitable.

There were a lot of excellent ideas for speakers and seminars, as well as a general wish for the OHA to make better use of technology to improve our outreach. All of the suggestions and

the information we gathered will be used to help guide us over the next few years, so I would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond with such thoughtful comments. A complete summary of the responses will be available shortly through the professional login area of the web site.

Finally, the OHA board remains committed to openness. The minutes of all meetings are posted on the web site for members to read, and we continue to send out information updates whenever possible. If you have any comments about your association, about the way it is run, the direction we are going, or anything you would like to see us take on, please let us know.

Thank you.

Diane Kent  
President, Ontario Herbalists Association