Maintaining A Tradition of Clinical Education

By Mert Aksu, DDS, JD

Preparing Graduates who Are “Ready for Today” and Tomorrow

As I enter my seventh year as dean at the School of Dentistry and the start of my 28th anniversary since graduation, writing this article gives me an opportunity to reflect on the past and look toward the future. And as I think about it, I realize that the circle of regularity within dental education remains constant; new entering classes, orientation week, board examinations, semester changes and final exams, preclinical programs, clinical orientations, treatment planning, the memories of the first restoration, first denture, and ultimately graduation.

Much like drifting desert sands, the progression of activities at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry seems never-ending and the conditions ever-changing. This flux in our environment and in health care delivery is becoming the “new normal,” and our graduates need to have the tools to feel secure in these times.

UDM distinguishes itself through both the rigor and volume of number of clinical experiences each student is afforded throughout his/her education. UD/UDM alumni resonate proudly their awareness of this aspect as an educational program strength. This reputation is widely known throughout the dental community, and the clinical proficiency of our graduates is a point of pride for all those who associate with the School of Dentistry.

Each year, as I prepare for public appearances and write for various publications, I reflect on the tradition of our School, our dedicated faculty, and our overall commitment to providing an education consistent with the mission to graduate clinicians equipped with evidence-based, contemporary, practical and pragmatic experiences, who are “practice ready” and can meet the primary oral health care needs of the population. This is the core of who we are … our identity, our mission, and this is what our alumni are most proud of when they talk about their experiences at UD/UDM.

Meeting expectations as we maintain our tradition is no small task. Urban patients present with unique and complicated challenges. The populations of patients served by the students of UDM have disease patterns that students of some schools rarely experience. Caries rates, periodontal disease rates, and the psycho-social challenges in the populations served by the UDM students provide the type of clinical experiences that support the development of their diagnostic and treatment-planning skills.

Patients with complex needs afford students an opportunity to develop confidence in diagnosis, treatment sequencing, and execution. Consistent with the
mission of the School of Dentistry, students continue to provide comprehensive care to many patients who would not otherwise receive care, and each year several thousand new patients receive treatment at UDM. While it is these experiences that define and shape the clinical skills of UDM graduates, an unfortunate consequence of the economic decline of southeastern Michigan is the ever-increasing numbers of patients with severe sequella of dental disease.

Of course, this year the news was filled with the “Bankruptcy of the city of Detroit.” And with the news, I often am asked how the bankruptcy affected the School of Dentistry. On a day-to-day basis, the financial crisis was on the minds of many at UDM. The decision to file for bankruptcy ultimately impacted the School of Dentistry more by what our applicant pool felt than by anything else. The “bankruptcy news” created more doubt in those from far away than those who were living through it, and with the expanded class sizes and targeted recruiting at several “out-of-state” schools, the admissions interview was a critical part of assuaging any doubt that lingered.

In the end, the decision freed the city of Detroit to begin investing and attracting investors as a part of moving forward, and the positive news of reinvestment in the city has overshadowed most of the negativism. And, once again this year, housing value increases and demand for housing in the immediate Corktown area of the School of Dentistry continue to outpace most of southeastern Michigan. Additionally, as noted in Crain’s Detroit Business, a $148 million American Lightweight and Modern Metals Manufacturing Innovation Institute will locate this fall in a vacant 99,000-square-foot Corktown building. Clearly, our area is part of Detroit’s future growth and renaissance.

The applicant pool and the entering Class of 2014

Our dental applicant pool has remained strong, both in numbers and in quality. For the 2014 entering class, 1,817 AADSAS applications were initiated for UDM, representing a slight decrease of 111 over the previous year. The Admissions Committee formally reviewed 921 candidates and invited 588 applicants to interview. The entering dental class, as of the time of this article, currently consists of 140 confirmed enrollees with deposits. (Offers to 346 individuals were made from a pool of 1,639 candidates with completed applications.) The class of 2018, consisting of 43 percent Michigan residents, is 56 percent male, 44 percent female, and boasts an average GPA of 3.68 with an average DAT score of 21. (Most recent statistics equate this to a 85th percentile, from the current applicant pool.) Even with 65 U.S. dental schools and 10 Canadian dental schools, U.S. national first year enrollment remains below the 6,301 students that were enrolled in 1978. The class of 2018 will be the third class entering UDM since the enrollment expansion.

The School of Dentistry’s dental hygiene program also attracts strong applicants. This year’s entering dental hygiene class (the class of 2016) is made up of 26 students (average GPA of 3.2), all Michigan residents, from a pool of more than 200 applicants. The dental hygiene program begins a new cohort each May, and students attend full-time during the summer term. Dental hygiene applicants distinguish and prefer UDM because of its integrated dental school experience.
Broadening the base of interest in dental careers and cultivating competency in educationally or economically disadvantaged applicants

The School of Dentistry has received national recognition for its efforts in providing students from under-represented backgrounds opportunities to become part of the dental profession. The School of Dentistry is involved in several programs intended to reduce health disparities, increase awareness of dental career opportunities, and improve health literacy, with the ultimate goal of igniting interest in dental careers in children from educationally or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These programs have brought funding opportunities, enhanced our role as a partner in the Michigan Area Health Education Center grant, and allowed UDM to provide pre-dental students with access to summer enrichment programs to better prepare them for the rigors and challenges of dental school.

Consistent with the Jesuit and Mercy Mission, prospective students from underprivileged backgrounds who demonstrate the potential to succeed are offered opportunities to explore dentistry as a profession. As a part of this mission, this year the School of Dentistry received support for these activities including $75,000 in grant-funded support from the American Dental Education Association through W. K. Kellogg Foundation funding. This grant enhances support for the formation of academic and community partnerships to reduce oral health disparities for vulnerable children and communities. This grant gives national recognition to the efforts of UDM.

The program also provides funding for the School of Dentistry’s Sealant Program, which also receives funding from the Michigan Department of Community Health through its “Seal! Michigan” school-based, school-linked dental sealant program. Participation in the school-based sealant program gives UDM an opportunity to contribute to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey statistics on the status of oral health in children, and also provides community experiences to all of our dental hygiene students. Children served by these school-based programs not only receive preventive care, they also learn about dentistry as a profession and engage in classroom activities promoting oral health education. Children needing restorative care are provided appropriate referrals.

In partnership with the Children’s Oral Health Initiative, the School of Dentistry provides oral health literacy education to several Detroit elementary schools through the “Lessons in a Lunch Box Healthy Teeth Essentials & Facts About Snacks” program. Dr. Deirdre Young and UDM students use the Lunchbox program to target “at risk” children with programs proven to improve oral health awareness and reduce disease. These programs also give children career information about various roles of the dental team.

In the 2013-14 federal Fiscal Year, UDM received funds appropriated for its Health Careers Opportunity Program intended to increase the number of individuals from educationally or economically disadvantaged backgrounds who enter the health and allied health professions program. As part of a six-week summer program during May and June of 2014, disadvantaged students received formal academic and research training and programming to enhance student success. The UDM program provided counseling and mentoring to assist students in successfully pursuing a dental education.

In addition to all the above, the School of Dentistry has been recognized as a partner in the national “Tour 4 Diversity in Medicine” program. This program targets recruiting students from undergraduate programs not affiliated with a medical or dental school. The Aetna Foundation is the program’s founding sponsor. As a part of the tour, 15
physicians, dentists and medical school students from across the country will travel more than 1,000 miles to provide full-day, hands-on workshops to undergrad students on various campuses. UDM’s Dr. Deirdre Young, director of multicultural affairs, participates in the program.

**Accreditation, graduation and being prepared for tomorrow**

The Commission on Dental Accreditation performed scheduled site visits at the School of Dentistry from March 25 through March 27, 2014. In the preliminary site visit report, CODA provided feedback and indicated that its report would support continued “Accreditation Without Reporting Requirements” for the Predoctoral, Advanced Education in General Dentistry, Endodontics, and Dental Hygiene programs. CODA performs site visits on all accredited dental and allied dental programs once each seven years.

The School of Dentistry celebrated its 81st graduating class on May 9, where 99 doctorate of dental surgery degrees, 29 bachelor of science and dental hygiene certificates, and 17 specialty certificates and master of science degrees were granted. Our commencement speaker was William R. Maas, DDS, MPH, MS, assistant surgeon general, (retired) U.S. Public Health Service. Dr. Maas traces his roots back to suburban Detroit and has great affection for the community and the public health experiences UDM graduates receive as a part of their education. Dr. Maas spoke of the need to be “ready for tomorrow” and being in Detroit, he spoke about hockey and said that in order to be good at hockey, it is not important to “skate to where the puck is” but to “skate to where the puck is going to be . . .” He pointed out that this is true about everything in life, including dentistry.

This is the spirit of “being prepared for tomorrow” . . . UDM graduates understand the dynamics of change, and the pressures of providing care to those who do not have the traditional means to access dental care. With ever-increasing numbers of people who lack access to routine dental care, UDM graduates understand the urgency to find solutions to meet the needs of those who “fall through the cracks” and those “who lack the means” to access the “fee-for-service” system.

UDM graduates are prepared to meet the challenges of changing delivery systems, changing reimbursement mechanisms, and changing relationships between dental providers and physicians as the connection between oral and systemic health continues to unfold. The School of Dentistry curriculum is designed to promote critical thinking and self-assessment, both essential skills to manage and adapt to the changing health care delivery challenges.

**Faculty additions and accomplishments**

Over the course of the past year, as the School of Dentistry continues to accommodate the progression of our expanded enrollment, several new faculty have joined the UDM family. Along with faculty recruitment, significant investment in faculty development and training is part of our commitment to “educate the educators” so that new faculty can be most effective in shaping the future of our profession. Once appointed, faculty members are given opportunities to attend the Institute of Teaching and Learning to assist with their transition into education. Faculty are also provided financial support and release time to attend continuing education and professional development programming intended to improve their effectiveness in the didactic and clinical education. This investment is imperative for the success of the faculty as an educator, and having faculty who are not only distinguished clinicians, but also trained educators enhances the student’s learning and improves mutual satisfaction for both the student and faculty in the often challenging task of teaching.

Below are the most recent additions.

**Dr. Rehab Alabduljabbar** — Clinical Assistant Professor, Pediatric Dentistry

**Dr. Salvatore Cutino** — Clinical Associate Professor, Patient Management
In March, Dr. Riyad Al-Qawasmi, associate professor in the Department of Orthodontics, was awarded the American Association of Orthodontists’ 2014 Subtelny, Baker, Eastman Teaching Fellowship Award in the amount of $15,000 for research. The research project supported by the fellowship will evaluate the heritability of smile genetic in non-treated siblings.

During the 2014 annual meetings of the American Dental Education Association and the American Association for Dental Research, 28 presentations/posters were presented by faculty/students. Individually, 23 faculty had peer reviewed posters/presentations.

Titles and authorship of some of the projects are included below:

- Palanci, JA. Special interest group on career development for the new educator member’s forum.
- Wheater M. Teaching innovations in the biomedical sciences: short talks.
- Hillenburg K. Weaving cultural competence education into case-based teaching and learning.
- Ojha J, Wheater M, Summersett J. Determining the importance of histology to pathology courses in the dental curriculum.
- Ku S, Hoelscher DC, Neely AL, Wheater MA. Student and faculty learning styles related to student preferences.
- Relich E, Gaugler, J. Effects of the OSCE on dental hygiene students.
- Young D, Hoelscher D. Pipeline program to expose disadvantaged public school students to dentistry.
- Loewen J. It takes a team to kick tobacco.
- Daniels J. Holistic student development: educating the whole student in a humanistic environment.
- Virdi A, Dao C, Miller D. Student-led presentations at ADEA: let’s get engaged!
- Okolisan-Mulligan KV, Balasundaram A. Effective teaching principles utilized in a radiographic interpretation course — from shell to structure.
- Shepherd K, Trombly R, Zeitz C, Palanci J. Faculty development and the science of learning.
- Hope K, Chang KJ, Jacobs LC, Wheater M. Crevicular fluid MMP8 levels in platform-switched and conventional implants.
- Almassi S, Palanci J, Wagner W. Dimensional stability of polyvinylsiloxane impression material subjected to temperature extremes.
- Williams III JJ, Wheater M, Ahmad MK. Concentrations of substance P in saliva correlate to dental pain.
- Stephan S, Palanci J. The efficacy of instructional videos on patient dental IQ.
- Chitre SD, Wagner W, Lim W, Patel S. Dental schools: consistency of caries detection techniques and treatment planning.

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**Preliminary DDS Class of 2018 Profile (as of June 23, 2014)**

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Data</th>
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Is your office HIPAA compliant? Do you understand the rules and regulations under HIPAA? Join us, September 10th or 11th, as our guest speakers, Elizabeth Callahan – Morris and Melissa Markey, discuss key concepts to implement in your office to make sure your office is compliant, as well as what you should do in case there has been a breach in your office.

Free for all Members of the Michigan Association of Dental Office Managers! $30 for Non-Members

About the Speakers

Elizabeth Callahan-Morris and Melissa Markey are compliance attorneys with Hall, Render, Killian, Heath, and Lyman, LLC based in Troy, MI. They focus on HIPAA privacy and security, patient care issues, and compliance. They are very involved in several organizations, including the American Health Lawyers Association, the Health Care Compliance Association and the State Bar of Michigan’s Health Care Law, where Elizabeth Callahan – Morris serves as a HIPAA Task Force Co-Chairperson.

To register, please visit our website www.MIADOM.org, or contact Ashley at (800) 494-4330/info@miadom.org

About the Seminar

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