

Reflections on a successful tenure at The University of Pretoria

Professor Andre van Zyl, Head: Department of Periodontics and Oral Medicine, University of Pretoria



It is hard to believe that 11 years and 6 months have gone by since I moved up to Pretoria with my family to start my tenure as Head of the Department of Periodontics and Oral Medicine at the University of Pretoria. The time has flown by and with weeks left before I depart, it is perhaps time to reflect on what we have achieved during my time here in the north at the University of Pretoria.

My focus has always been on striving for excellence in undergraduate training and building on that for the specialist training. I soon realized that finances were tight and that I would have to generate a new stream of money if I wanted to make changes to our under- and postgraduate training.

On my arrival in 2006 the most often repeated question was when I would start a postgraduate implant programme, as we had done that so successfully at Stellenbosch University. This was clearly the way forward to generate funds and I started planning the way forward very soon after arriving.

Before we could start the course I had to obtain sponsorships for the infrastructure as we had nothing of the sort at the time. Straumann and Dentsply-Friadent (now Dentsply Sirona Implants) were very supportive during those early years. Peter Anderson of ASM (Pty Ltd) and Brian Pfohl of Implants for Africa (Friadent) deserve special mention for their support and involvement.

On the clinical side I had to assemble a new team as such a large undertaking demanded a large multidisciplinary team, but most importantly - a team with the philosophy of transferring skills in implant dentistry to all who wished to learn.

Once we had the team ready and the course was up and running we immediately achieved great momentum and success. Our successful team consisted of team members Gerrit Wyima (MaxFac in Somerset West), Paul van Zyl

(Prosthodontist in Cape Town) and Christiaan Vorster (Prosthodontist in Somerset West) who travelled up regularly to Pretoria to join Cules van den Heever (Prosthodontist from Pretoria), Billy Lombard (General Practitioner from Pretoria) and members of my department. Special mention has to go to the brilliant registrars I was fortunate to recruit to my department and who played an integral part in this programme over many years. Some of those have now qualified as specialists, with Geoff Patterson in Pretoria, Corlene Schnetler in Cape Town, Lira Rahman who is furthering her studies in Switzerland (and was also selected as an ITI Scholar in Bern) and Michaela Beetge who is now a consultant in the department. Olivin Glen-Spyron (qualifying this year) and Inus Snyman (in his second year) are two registrar members who have also been of great help and are still in the training programme. I am confident they will do well and I will follow their progress with great interest.

Our multidisciplinary approach no doubt played a role in making our course the largest of its kind in Africa. Hundreds of postgraduate students have completed the programme over the past 7 years, with students coming from countries as far away as Canada and Colombia. Most students came from Africa - which was our focus market, with students from Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Angola, Mauritius and Botswana joining many colleagues from United Arab Emirates in attending the two year course. Many of those progressed to the postgraduate diploma, the largest diploma intake at the School of Dentistry, which was our follow-on programme in oral Implantology training and even



Figure 1: Students busy with surgical hands-on training on animal heads.



Figure 2: Prof Trombelli presenting a master class in periodontal regeneration.



Figure 3: Students during a hands-on session in the lab.

to their Master's degree. It was very gratifying to see these students progress in this vertical linked training programme.

This two-year Postgraduate Programme in Oral Implantology was, of course, instrumental in our successful application to the International Team for Implantology (ITI) in Switzerland for recognition, and in 2013 we achieved the honour of becoming the 9th ITI Center of Excellence in the world, and the 22nd ITI Scholarship Center. Many scientific articles flowed from this collaboration and as recent as December of 2017, two articles were accepted for international publication from the ITI Scholar of 2016 (Vladimir Todorovic of Serbia), with many more in the pipeline. It just shows what team work can achieve.

Through the years we have also had some illustrious visitors from all over the world to my department, many of

whom have become great friends of South Africa, with H-P Weber from Boston (USA), Danny Buser and Urs Belser from Bern (Switzerland), David Cochran from San Antonio (USA), Dean Morton from Louisville (USA), Will Martin from Gainesville (USA), Stephen Chen from Melbourne (Australia), Ady Palti from New York (USA), Dietmar Weng from Starnberg (Germany), Joseph Choukroun from Nice (France), Leonardo Trombelli from Ferraro (Italy), Paul Weigl from Frankfurt (Germany) and Fred Bergmann from Viernheim (Germany). Three of those were sitting ITI presidents when visiting us.

As part of being an ITI Center of Excellence, we presented our 1st ITI Education Week in 2014, and it was the 2nd largest in the world that year, narrowly beaten by Prof Buser's EW in Bern. This was a brilliant start for our



Figure 4: Andre with ITI Scholar Vladimir after a live surgery on course.



Figure 5: Students placing implants on phantom heads.



Figure 6: Dean Morton from the USA explaining the finer detail of implant prosthetics.

young team and we improved on this in the following years. Many of our distinguished guests took part and presented during our EW's.

Most importantly was that the success of the postgraduate programme had a knock-on effect for undergraduate training in oral Implantology and from 2015 we started 4th year dental students on a hands-on training programme in oral Implantology. We were able to use the sponsored equipment for the training of undergraduates and students were also able to attend our postgraduate training sessions over weekends, with even their meals sponsored by Peter Anderson and Straumann.

This exposure to implant dentistry at such an early stage of their dental training was, in my opinion, the most important development from our implant programme. In the

hands-on training it was amazing to see the undergraduates preparing wax-ups for surgical stents and placing implants in models developed in-house by us with money generated by the course. We also invited the final year class to the ITI National Congress in 2010 free of charge - again due to generous sponsorship from Straumann South Africa. This was repeated at subsequent congresses. .

It was certainly an enriching experience for all involved, but sadly it has now come to an end. With my resignation from UP, I had to close the ITI Center of Excellence, ITI Scholarship Center and the Postgraduate Programme in Oral Implantology. As a consequence of losing the infrastructure, we have also had to cancel dental implant training for the undergraduates from 2018 - a sad day indeed. I wish to thank each and everyone who was involved in this amazing team, and especially the International Team for Implantology with their head quarters in Switzerland for their recognition and collaboration. Rene Catchpole who was the clinical coordinator deserves a special mention as without her I would have given up long ago.

It is however now time to move on and I will return with my family to private practice in beautiful Hermanus in the Overberg. This is a very exciting venture for us as a family and although 2018 will be set aside for the move down to the Western Cape, I hope that by 2019 we will come up with a new chapter, a new, even larger, team and hopefully we will continue where we left off in 2017 with exciting courses on offer.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to the sponsors who made all of this possible; Straumann, Dentsply-Friadent, Nobel Biocare, Wright Millners, MegaGen Implants, The Dental Warehouse and Ursula Jenkins who has helped so much in the journal, *International Dentistry (African Edition)* of which I remain Associate Editor.

Lastly I wish to thank my wife Karen and sons Ruan and Stephan for all the support they have given me over the past 11 years.

It has been a great journey.