

# University of Pretoria School of Dentistry - Africa's first ITI Center of Excellence and Scholarship Center

Andre W. van Zyl<sup>1</sup>

Over the last 15 years I have had the privilege to have known and worked with many colleagues in implant dentistry, both nationally and abroad. All of them have contributed to my knowledge and skills in this exciting field. Many of those colleagues have taken part in courses that we started in 2000 at the then University of Stellenbosch School of Dentistry and later continued at the amalgamated University of the Western Cape Faculty of Dentistry.

At the University of Pretoria School of Dentistry I have been able to build a team consisting of those colleagues from Stellenbosch and new ones from Pretoria, combining what is arguably the top team of experts involved in the teaching of Postgraduate Implant Dentistry in South Africa and Africa. The central concept in this has been and still remains the concept of working in a multidisciplinary team.

Towards the end of 2012 we had more than 200 postgraduate students in our Oral Implantology Certificate Programme and as a team we felt the time was right to take our teaching to a new level. September 2012 I travelled to London for the ITI AGM and Scientific day and we had the opportunity to engage the ITI leadership in discussions around a possible application for an ITI Center of Excellence (ITI CoE) and ITI Scholarship Center (ITI SC) for South Africa. Both these Centers would be seated in the Department of Periodontics and Oral Medicine at the School of Dentistry, University of Pretoria. We realised that this would be a very ambitious attempt at getting both an ITI CoE and SC at the same time, but the team was very positive and so I submitted these applications on behalf of Team Pretoria as I have come to call them.

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In April of 2013 most of us were gathered at the ITI AGM in Bern, Switzerland when the announcement came from the Chair of the University Programme committee, Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Weber (Tufts University, USA), that we had been successful in our bid for the ITI CoE (10<sup>th</sup> in the world) and the Chair of the Scholarship Committee, Prof. Dr. Frauke Muller (Geneva University, Switzerland), informed us that we had also been successful in being granted an ITI SC (21<sup>st</sup> in the world). Our gratitude goes to them and their committee members for their belief in our vision and track record and entrusting us with the ITI philosophy in Africa. Perhaps it was fitting that such momentous news was announced in Bern, the capital of Switzerland. It was here that the seed was planted for this idea many years ago when I attended my first ITI Education Week at the Bern ITI Center of Excellence under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Daniel Buser. Not in my wildest dreams could I have envisaged that we would achieve this in such a short space of time.

Although I am the coordinator of all of this, all credit should go to the team, namely Dr's Gerrit Wyma, Paul van Zyl, Christiaan Vorster, Cules van den Heever (Head of the Prosthodontic section), Billy Lombard, Prof's Johan Marnewick, Johan Hartshorne and of course my postgraduate students. These individuals, many of them in private practice, have given their time selflessly- with practices and family life suffering for it. A special word of mention should go to my excellent support staff in the department under the able leadership of Rene Catchpole for sacrificing so many weekends over the last 3 years. Such an enormous undertaking as this can of course never get off the ground without sponsorship and we have to thank our commercial partners ASM (Pty Ltd), Wright Millners and Hartshorne International for being there when it counted. Without the full support of Ursula Jenkins at International



*Professor David Cochran visits the new ITI Center of Excellence, School of Dentistry, University of Pretoria.*

*Standing from left: Prof Andre W van Zyl, Head, Dept of Periodontics and Oral Medicine, University of Pretoria; Dr Paul van Zyl, ITI Education Delegate (Chair) Southern Africa; Prof Johan Marnewick, Dept of Periodontics and Oral Medicine, University of Pretoria*

*Sitting from left: Prof Francois de Wet, Deputy Chairperson, School of Dentistry, University of Pretoria; Prof David L Cochran, President, ITI International Team for Implantology*

Dentistry (African Edition) in helping us reach our target audience, it would have been a much higher mountain to climb.

What does it mean to be an ITI CoE or SC? It means that we will be presenting the first ITI Education Week on African soil in July 2014 and that we will host our first ITI Scholar from September 2014. As ITI Scholars are selected for this prestigious award in countries other than their own, we will expose an international scholar to the University of Pretoria every year from 2014/15 onwards.

Because of this great honour that has befallen us at Tuks, we will introduce the first Diploma in Odontology (Oral Implantology) at the University of Pretoria from 2014 onwards, which will be coupled to the ITI Education Week. This one-year diploma is the culmination of years of preparation. With limited registration, first indications are that we will be over subscribed and I attribute this to the fact that Team Pretoria is a dedicated, professional team who has as their passion the education of dental colleagues in implant dentistry. This passion has drawn students from 13 countries to Tuks over the last 3 years, and we are geared to spread

the brand even wider in the years to come.

As Daniel Buser explained so eloquently in his farewell speech as ITI President in April 2013, the ITI stands for the **International Team for Implantology**, and it is exactly that **Team** spirit that has made it grow so phenomenally over the last 3 years. We at Team Pretoria try to embody that spirit in everything we do. No single person is bigger than the philosophy of teamwork; passion for spreading knowledge and the fact that we want to empower practitioners by this transfer of skills.

In conclusion I have to thank two people who have made this possible: Firstly thanks to our Dean, Prof. Dr At Ligthelm, for his support and belief in my vision for the Department of Periodontics and Oral Medicine and secondly Prof. Dr Daniel Buser for his guidance, advice and friendship over the years. Without them this would never have been possible.

I truly believe that this ITI recognition will change the face of implant training in South Africa. We look forward to many years of collaboration with the ITI, starting with the visit by the new ITI President, Prof. Dr David Cochran's to our School in July 2013.