



**Charting
New Directions
for the
University of
Connecticut
School of
Dental
Medicine**

VOL. V, ISSUE IV

WINTER, 2005

School of Dental Medicine is Reorganized

by Peter J. Robinson, DDS, PhD, Dean

The reorganization of the University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine was approved by the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees on November 17, 2004. The Board of Trustees formally dissolved the nine departments in the School of Dental Medicine and approved three new departments as follows:

Department of Oral Rehabilitation, Biomaterials and Skeletal Development	Department of Oral Health and Diagnostic Sciences	Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Orthodontics, Pediatric Dentistry and Advanced General Dentistry
<p>Disciplines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosthodontics • Operative Dentistry • Biomaterials • BioStructure and Function • Center for Research Education in Technology Evaluation 	<p>Disciplines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral Medicine • Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology • Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology • Endodontology • Periodontology • Neuroscience • Behavioral Sciences and Community Health 	<p>Disciplines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery • Orthodontics • Pediatric Dentistry • Advanced General Dentistry

The goals of this reorganization include: improve our research capability, provide more consistent faculty mentoring, improve the implementation of curriculum change and more effectively use our staff support. After eighteen months of Task Force meetings, group discussions and all faculty meetings, it was decided that the approved three-department model is the best way to organize the School to achieve these School goals.

The task at hand is to identify the leaders for these new departments and develop the financial, staff and governance structure for each department. All of this will be accomplished within our current resources. Three search committees were

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Message from the Dean

Peter Robinson, DDS, PhD

2004 has been an exciting and challenging year for the School of Dental Medicine. Reorganization of the School from nine to three departments was the headliner for this year. I assume next year's headlines will include the faculty and staff adjustment to the new organization, as well as successes as the intended result of the new model.

Another of our great successes of this year include the magnificent recognition the School achieved by being a recipient of the multi-million dollar U-24 NIH infrastructure grant. This grant is tailor made for our needs and goals in moving our research activities to the next level.

In addition to the many impressive faculty achievements this year, our students have excelled on many fronts. The students have had superb outcomes this past year on Boards and the residency Match. Equally important, they have found time in their incredibly busy schedules to organize and provide a wide array of volunteer services to special needs patients and poor patients in Connecticut and literally throughout the world. The students' research work has resulted in many of them (and their mentors) being recognized with national awards as illustrated by the three students, Jessica Costa-Guida, Ritu Bahl and Colin Kong featured in this issue.

Let's make 2005 the year of collegial achievement!

Periodontology has a New Leader



Maurizio Tonetti

The School of Dental Medicine is most pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Maurizio Tonetti as Professor and Head of Periodontology. Dr. Tonetti has an extraordinary international reputation as a major "thought leader" in Periodontics.

He comes to us from the University College London, University of London where he was Professor of Periodontology; Head, Department of Periodontology, Eastman Dental Institute and Hospital, and Director of the Specialist Training Program in Periodontology. His education and training includes BS from Liceo C. Colombo, Genova, Italy; DMD from University of Genova, Italy; MMS in Oral Biology, Harvard; Certificate in Periodontology, Harvard; Certificate in Pharmacology, Forsyth Dental Center, Boston; and a PhD in Periodontology and Pathophysiology, University of Berne, Switzerland.

Dr. Tonetti has won numerous awards for his research work including the Research Competition Award, European Federation of Periodontology; "Lorenzo il Magnifico" research prize, Italian Society of Periodontology; H. R. Mühlemann research prize, Swiss Society of Periodontology; Young Investigator Award, IADR; the Anthony Rizzo Periodontal Research Award, IADR; and the Giuseppe Sfregola Research Prize for Career Scientific Achievements, Italian Dental Association.

Prior to being at the University College London, he was Professor of Implantology on the medical faculty, University of Genova and Associate Professor Periodontology, School of Dental Medicine, University of Berne. He has been and is on many editorial boards. Currently, he is the Editor of the Journal of Clinical Periodontology. He has been the author of over 80 original articles and 44 book chapters and literature reviews. Dr. Tonetti's current research work is in four major areas: Periodontitis as a cause of systemic inflammatory burden, genetic susceptibility to periodontitis, genomics and proteomics of bone-implant contact and the efficacy and clinical application of periodontal regeneration.

Dr. Tonetti resides in Avon with his wife and their two children.



Ritu Bahl (D '06) took first first place at the 2004 ADA/Dentsply Student Clinician Program in Orlando, Florida. She will receive a travel prize to attend the Midwinter Meeting of the Chicago Dental Society.





Dental Student's Experience at the National Institutes of Health

by Colin King (DS '07)

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is located in Bethesda, Maryland and its campus is home to some 27 research institutes and centers of varying interests. From behavioral to medical research, it is more than likely that a whole research center is dedicated to your favorite flavor of scientific thought. The NIH campus is also home to the NIDCR – the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. It was at this institute where I did my research this past summer.

The application process was a simple one consisting of the usual prerequisites for most award competitions: a CV, a description of research experience, transcripts from all academic institutions attended, a personal statement outlining the applicant's interest in the program, three letters of evaluation, and a letter of sponsorship from the Dean confirming the applicant is in good academic standing and promising to provide round trip transportation to and from Washington, D.C.

After these materials were assembled and delivered to the NIH, I didn't need to wait all that long. My application was completed by January 10, and I was notified of my award sometime in mid-March.

The award letter came with useful information to make the transition as easy as possible. The acceptance packet was very much like the ones that received when you are accepted to college and included: suggestions on where to find affordable housing in the DC metro area, where to park to get to the NIH, site-seeing suggestions for our nation's capital, and the summer stipend rate - which is based on your graduate degree status and previous research experience. But more importantly, it gave me the name of my summer mentor.

When I first was notified of winning the NIDCR Summer Dental Award to do research for two months at the NIH, I was excited and nervous at the same time. On one hand, I was excited and honored to be selected to participate in such a prestigious program. At the same time however, I was also apprehensive about being able to gather enough data within an eight-week period to contribute something of significance to a research project.

My award letter came with notification that I was to work in the lab of a Dr. Paul Kolenbrander. I knew from speaking with faculty here at UConn Dental and performing a simple PubMed search that Dr. Kolenbrander was a leader in the field of biofilm communication. In fact, his lab focuses on biofilms of the mouth. Though well known with an impressive list of publications, Dr. Kolenbrander was not a man of pomp and circumstance, but someone who went out of his way to welcome me and make me feel comfortable in my new surroundings on the NIH campus. He was obviously a passionate researcher with a true sense of humanity. One of the first and certainly most memorable lab postings I read on the lab door was "Dreams mean work." With that inspiration, I was ready to start my project.

My research project was to molecularly characterize colonizing biofilms on enamel. A biofilm is essentially a community of bacteria adhering to a moist environmental surface. We find them associated with many things in nature including medical implants, our running water supply, and our teeth. Without getting into the gritty details, my project this summer was to characterize what specific bacteria initially colonized our teeth. Having this knowledge could possibly serve as the basis for a better understanding of plaque formation.

Research was intense hard work. But in the end, it was well worth it because I had accumulated enough significant data to be part of a scientific publication.

Research at the NIH was such an eye-opening experience for me. It afforded me the opportunity to not only sit in a lab and refine my wet bench skills but interact with individuals who had common research interests. Most importantly it exposed me to how people think with a scientific eye – asking the right questions, forming the right hypothesis, and tackling that question in a scientific manner.

In the end, my experience at the NIH ended before it got started. Working hard and spending lots of time in lab have a way of making time pass quickly. The next thing you know, I needed to pack up my things, clean up my bench top, say my farewells, and make the trip back up to Connecticut for the start of the second year of dental school here at UConn. In retrospect, my eight weeks at the NIH this summer was well worth the investment.

SDM Reorganized

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appointed to identify and present candidates to me to fill the position of Head of the Department for each of the new departments. It is projected the search committees will have completed their work before the end of January 2005. It is my intention to select the new heads through our internal pool of outstanding candidates. Immediately after the new department heads have been appointed, each of the new departments under the leadership of their head and working closely with my Administration, will define their staff organization, financial model and governance organization which fits each department's specific vision and needs.

It has been just a short month since the reorganization was formally approved by the Board of Trustees and yet there is an aura of new found energy and a greater spirit of collegiality in the School as we work through this process of moving several disciplines together under larger, more welcoming department umbrellas. I want to thank the faculty and staff for being supportive to each other and the School as we make this monumental transition. The goal of this transition is not to go from "good to great," but from "great to the best."

Jessica Costa-Guda, DMD/PhD

Fellow, attended the Hinman Student Research Symposium, October 29-31, 2004 in Memphis, Tennessee. Her oral presentation, "Non-random Clustering of Mitochondrial DNA Mutations in Parathyroid Adenomas," received the **"most outstanding presentation"** award at the symposium.



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The Compass is written for the dental school. We strongly encourage everyone to participate by submitting articles, events, milestones, etc. If you have any suggestions, please drop us a line.

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