

Prosthodontists as Deans

On August 16 of 2011, I started my second career in academic dentistry—after 28 years on the faculty at UNC-Chapel Hill, NC, I moved to Morgantown, West Virginia to become the new Dean of the WVU School of Dentistry. This move was made after much soul searching, contemplation, deliberation, and an extremely intense interview process. After all, I’ve just turned 62, Sue and I built our “dream home” on a golf course in beautiful Chapel Hill, NC, and the UNC School of Dentistry, and my role there, were “comfortable” and predictable. At any rate, after declaring that my next move would when the children moved me into the assisted care facility, I find myself uprooted, relocated, and facing extraordinary new challenges. Why, being within 6 to 8 years of full retirement, would I make such a life-altering change, you ask? Simply put, it was an opportunity I could not turn down. West Virginia has proven to be an exceptional place to live and work, and the overall beauty of this state is indescribable. I’ve never been anywhere else that is any cleaner, that has so much natural beauty, or where the people are any more genuine or kinder than here. While the citizens of our state face enormous disparities in health care, including oral health care, the opportunity to help reshape an established school of dentistry in order to address the health care concerns of the next millennium was compelling. Some have asked why I decided to go over to the “dark side” (becoming a dean), others have asked if I’ve lost my mind, and still others have simply congratulated me on my new position. What issues have I faced in my first three months?

First and foremost, in my role at UNC, I was dedicated to advancing the Department of Prosthodontics in research, continuing education, teaching, and patient care. A large undertaking, I thought. Here, I do the same thing, but on a much grander scale. At UNC, I dealt with students, faculty and staff colleagues, and alumni (during CE activities); at WVU, I deal with these same groups, but with *all* residency programs, a dental hygiene program, colleagues at the Health Sciences Center level and general university level, alumni, development staff,

and parents of pre-dental students. The complexity of fundraising initiatives has given me a much broader perspective of academic life, university life, and life outside the School of Dentistry. While the learning curve is steep, the support I’ve received from the faculty, staff, students, Health Sciences Center deans and administration, and the university in general has been, to quote a phrase, “priceless.” Now that I’ve been here for three months, I must admit this is truly a course of action I wish I’d considered doing years ago!

The point of this editorial is twofold. First, I’d like to stress that prosthodontists, in general, have excellent skill sets in multiple areas—this makes our specialty a prime pool for recruitment of new deans. Currently, several sitting deans are prosthodontists—Charlie Goodacre (Loma Linda), Patrick Lloyd (The Ohio State University), Avashai Sadan (Herman Ostrow), and myself. A number of open dean searches are in progress, with multiple schools of dentistry on the horizon (some estimates suggest up to 15). While I know the overall quality of our faculty is keenly important to the overall teaching mission at our academic institutions, it’s time for prosthodontists to step up to the task, and apply for these open dean positions—we can make a difference! Second, for those who might be interested, I’d like to offer my (limited) expertise on how to approach the dean search process. In my quest for the WVU position, I sought the council of five sitting or former deans (Howard Landesman, Charlie Goodacre, Ray Williams, John Williams, and Cosmo DeSteno)—their assistance was invaluable. I’m confident they would join me in assisting anyone in navigating the dean search process. We need more prosthodontists as deans! I look forward to the new challenges I face as WVU move to the forefront of academic excellence, and to helping each of you in your respective careers. Goooooo Mountaineers!

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