Introduction to the Symposium on Clinical Dental Practice: Current and Future Trends

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The clinical practice of dentistry has witnessed substantial changes in a single lifetime and is expected to undergo a major transformation in the future. These predicted changes are linked to declining trends in the prevalence of caries and periodontal diseases in many segments of the population; demographic shifts among dental providers; severe oral disease in high-risk patient groups; scientific and technological advances in the prevention of oral diseases; and an increasing influence of mechanisms for funding oral health care. Concurrently, edentulousness has decreased dramatically, and an increasing proportion of adults are maintaining a natural but restored dentition for a longer lifetime.

In the context of these changes in dental practice, an active and diligent symposium advisory committee surveyed the Pacific Northwest professional community, which included the almost 500 participants of the symposium, to identify those topics of greatest interest to the practicing dental team. The committee matched these areas of interest with speakers who are nationally recognized for experience and excellence in each topic to develop the Fifth Distinguished Professor in Dentistry Symposium.

The Washington Distinguished Professorship program has an illustrious history. In 1985, the State of Washington established the program by allocating funds to match private gifts to increase endowments at Washington’s public, four-year institutions of higher education. The University of Washington was granted nine of the professorships, including one for the School of Dentistry. In late 1987, the Washington Dental Service Foundation in Seattle generously provided the matching donation to establish the Washington Dental Service Foundation Distinguished Professorship in Dentistry.

The professorship addresses issues faced by the practicing dentist by using income from the endowment to support a triennial international symposium on current issues in dentistry with a look toward the future of dental practice. The primary responsibility of the holder of this professorship is to plan and implement the symposium and to edit and publish the resulting proceedings. All previous proceedings have been made available to the Pacific Northwest professional community and published in the Journal of Dental Education.

Dr. Charles L. Bolender, chair of the Department of Prosthodontics (1963-89), was appointed the first Distinguished Professor in 1989. He chaired the symposium entitled “Clinical Decision Making in Dentistry” held in Seattle, Washington, June 18-19, 1992. The proceedings were published in December 1992. Dr. Karl-Ake Omnell, dean of the School of Dentistry from 1981 to 1992, was the second Distinguished Professor and chaired the symposium entitled “Thriving in the Information Age: Information Organization and Management Tools in Dental Practice.” The symposium was held June 15-16, 1995, and the proceedings were published in January 1996. Dr. Roy C. Page, professor of periodontics and pathology, director of the Regional Clinical Dental Research Center, and a member of the faculty of the School of Dentistry since 1967, served as the third Distinguished Professor. He chaired the symposium entitled “Frontiers in Clinical Dentistry: Caries and
Periodontal Disease,” held May 21-22, 1998. The proceedings were published in October 1998. Dr. Samuel F. Dworkin, professor emeritus in the Departments of Oral Medicine and Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, was appointed the fourth Distinguished Professor. A full-time member of the University of Washington School of Dentistry faculty since 1974, Dr. Dworkin chaired the symposium entitled “Dentistry’s Future: Broadening the Impact on Patient Health and Dental Practice.” The fourth symposium was held on May 24-25, 2001, and published in December 2001.

The proceedings from the symposium held November 5-6, 2004, are published here. Topics addressed in the articles are diagnostic tests for oral disease (Kornman); risk assessment (Page et al.); treating nicotine addition (Walsh and Ellison); control of caries (Anusavice); regeneration of the teeth and periodontium (Fong et al.); dental biomaterials (Bayne); and reimbursement for dental care (Anderson).

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