No Medical Center is Complete without a Dental School

by Donald F. Bowers, D.D.S.

The history of The Ohio State University’s College of Dentistry intertwines with that of its College of Medicine, beginning with the incorporation of the Ohio Medical University in 1890. At that time, there were two medical schools in Columbus and two major hospitals. Since much of the city’s expansion was occurring north of the business district, it seemed reasonable to a group of physicians, businessmen, and a dentist to establish a medical school and hospital on the north side of the city.

Dr. Allen F. Emminger, a prominent Columbus dentist whose practice included the city’s elite, convinced the group that the new medical school should include a department of dentistry. Besides his influential status in Columbus society, Emminger was a leader in organized dentistry, having served as president of the Ohio State Dental Society.

In 1890, dental education in Ohio was rooted in Cincinnati where the Ohio College of Dental Surgery, the second dental college to be established in the United States and the world, was celebrating its 45th year of operation. The population of Ohio had more than doubled since its founding. To meet the demand for more formally trained dentists in Ohio’s two other major population centers, Columbus and Cleveland, the establishment of a dental school seemed to be a rational solution.

When the Ohio Medical University began classes on September 7, 1892, there were ten students enrolled in the Department of Dentistry. During the first five years of O.M.U.’s operation, dental students took their basic sciences with the medical students. This arrangement ended in 1898, after the Association of the American Medical Colleges mandated a four-year course of instruction for medical schools. The dental program remained at three years until 1916. The appointment of Dr. Louis Bethel in 1901 strengthened dentistry’s status within O.M.U. for the next six years. Bethel was a physician as well as leader in organized dentistry. He served as the editor of The Dental Summary, a prestigious national dental journal. He had earned his D.D.S. at the University of Michigan and his M.D. from the Cleveland University of Medicine and Surgery.

Dentistry was represented in the hospital setting by providing services in oral surgery. Initially, A. O. Ross, M.D., D.D.S., dentistry’s second dean, headed the service. From 1898 until 1915 the service was headed by W. J. Means, M.D., who later became Dean of the College of Medicine. In 1911, he was joined by his son, John W. Means, D.D.S., M.D., a 1906 O.M.U. dentistry graduate, who later obtained his medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania. Two years later, Dick P. Snyder, D.D.S., joined the Means’ in Oral Surgery. Snyder became the head of the service at the University Hospital in 1928 and remained in charge until his retirement in 1953.

An unfortunate string of events in the histories of The Ohio State University, the Ohio Medical University and the Starling Medical.

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House Call is intended to publicize our Medical Heritage Center, and to encourage our readers to “come up and visit us.” The editor of House Call, Jane Witherspoon, generously asked me to “plug” or “push for” the recently-published History of the OSU College of Medicine. It has a green cover, the traditional color for medicine and one that implies biology and growth, 330 pages, and over 200 photos from our past that mark the road to our present. The generosity of the Medical Staff, the hospital and the deans made this work possible and it was printed and bound at the OSU Print Facility.

What should have been included in a history of the College of Medicine? Surely Starling Loving, our early dean, but what about Swango, our most recently-publicized scoundrel? Is the great man – and most were then men – the true key to growth or was it funds from the legislature to build new hospital buildings? Should we emphasize which department has garnered the most research funds, or should the major topic be innovative educational advances such as the Independent Study Program and Problem-Based Learning? If you’ve chosen to pick out a William Havener from Ophthalmology, truly a remarkable leader, for singular praise, how can you not review the work of a William Saunders who led Otolaryngology for as long, and as well? The Heartmobile with Jim Warren was an original, as was the Medicopter with Stuart Roberts, but our students are the real originals and where do they all come from and where do they go? Does it matter, and should we review the fact, that less than 10% of the class in 1950 were women and that now over 40% are women? Does it matter that we can document greater diversity now than ever in the past? What of some of the remarkable plans, near-opportunities that were never completed, such as placing Riverside Methodist Hospital on the campus grounds in 1955? If our practice plan battle wasn’t a true “Viet-Nam,” was it at least something we not only learned from but need to review from time to time? Who’d have guessed that some departments have elegant year-end summaries, but that others have none? Where in the world did all the pictures in the book come from, and how accurate are the captions?

Jane wanted me to tell you about the book, all I can absolutely truthfully say is that it was more fun for me than it was for the long-suffering secretary, and that in fact it was more fun for me than it has been for anyone. Nevertheless, you might like to see one. Come up to our Medical Heritage Center, or even buy one of the books from them. The proceeds of the $25 purchase price for the book goes into the Medical Heritage Center Endowment Fund.
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College occurred in 1898. Certain faculty and administrators of both medical schools were desirous of becoming affiliated with Ohio State. Disputes resulted between the trustees of Ohio State and its president, between the Chancellor of O.M.U. and the faculties and between administrations of both medical schools. The result of the squabbles was the resignation of Ohio State's president, the firing of the O.M.U.'s chancellor and an end to serious discussion of affiliation by all parties for another decade. The dental school faculty kept out of the matter, a politically wise decision. When the smoke cleared, it was revealed that The Ohio State trustees, for reasons not recorded, had quietly passed a resolution to create a College of Dentistry. But the resolution was not acted upon.

In 1906 when formal discussions took place concerning the merging of O.M.U. and Starling Medical College into Starling Ohio Medical College, the fate of the College of Dentistry at O.M.U. was at first unclear. The newly appointed dental dean, Harry Semans, was able to convince both parties that dentistry would meet its financial obligations. One of the influential parties in the discussion was Ohio State's President William Oxley Thompson, who was impressed with the young dentistry dean who convinced him that no modern medical center would be complete without a dental school.

Therefore, when Ohio State acquired the Starling Ohio Medical College in 1914, there was no question that the dental school would be included. However, Dean Semans was surprised and disappointingly, it was to remain on Park Street. Semans was told that the state funds requested for the building were not sufficient to meet the estimates of the medical school's plans and include a dental faculty as well. The medical school had shown indifference to dentistry by not informing Semans of the situation earlier. President Thompson came to dentistry's rescue. He was able to have a separate line item included in the state budget for the construction of a north wing for dentistry on Hamilton Hall.

The Hamilton Hall matter contrasts with the medical center project begun in the late 1940s. The leaders in the medical community were wise in including dentistry and its dean in the planning. Dentistry's Dean Wendell D. Postle's ability to influence key legislators to fund the entire project was instrumental in the construction of the new University Hospital, Upham Hall, the Tuberculosis Hospital and the Dentistry Building, all of which became realities in 1950. Postle confided to this author that it had taken a few hundred holes of golf to steer the funding bill through the legislature and across the Governor's desk.

Postle forged links with the College of Medicine and the University Hospital. A Division of Dentistry was established in 1963 with a section of Oral Surgery. Morgan L. Allison, D.D.S., initiated a residency program in oral and maxillofacial surgery that has remained an indispensable service in the University Hospitals. The Anesthesia Department, under the direction of Dr. Jay Jacoby in the late 1950s, initiated a one-year residency in general anesthesia for dentists. Over the years, faculty members of the section of Oral Pathology have held joint appointments in the College of Medicine's Department of Pathology.

In the later 1930s, Lyle S. Pettit, D.D.S., Professor of Pediatric Dentistry, established a dental service at Children's Hospital, with the encouragement of Earl Baxter, M.D., Chairman of Pediatrics. In 1953, an internship in pediatric dentistry and anesthesia was instituted. Today dentistry is a major service at Children's Hospital and boasts one of the nation's top pediatric dentistry residency programs. More recently, a general practice (dentistry) residency program has provided University Hospitals' and the James Cancer Hospital's inpatients with dental care.

For more than a century, the College of Dentistry and the College of Medicine generally have enjoyed an excellent working relationship. Dean Semans was prophetic in his estimate that any medical center would be incomplete without dentistry.

1 Audio-taped interview with William V. Walton, Jr., D.D.S., '22, retired Professor of Periodontology, October, 1999.
Currently on display in the Medical Heritage Center is an exhibit entitled “Early public health issues in Columbus”. It focuses on specialty hospitals that were created to treat individual health issues, such as tuberculosis. The exhibit on the State Psychiatric Hospital is on loan from a local history buff, Mr. Gary Carter. An exhibit on the achievements of Dr. Charles Austin Doan is also on display, along with a sampling of some recent donations. The displays are located in the main hallway of the Medical Heritage Center and may be viewed 1-5 p.m., Monday-Friday. The current displays will be available through August, 1999.

The Medical Heritage Center would like to thank those listed for their recent support. If you are interested in donating to the Center, please contact Barbara Van Brimmer, 614.292.4891.

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