Greetings from Gainesville, Florida. With all that’s going on in our world today, from fiscal crises to wars and natural disasters, I am sure that it was a pleasure to join the Gator Nation on January 8, and enjoy an amazing win for our football team. I am immensely proud to be a part of this great university. This most recent national championship makes it even more important that the UF College of Dentistry maintain our status of national prominence in the areas of education, research and service. I am happy to report that, despite current economic challenges, we excel in all areas.

We’re going to be the second most important answers we can employ as we move forward.” Medical professionals? We have the questions and the research will provide us with our audience, we’ll hold a critical key that can help shape state and national policy. Logan says, “If we can learn what works, what resonates and how to communicate effectively, then we can improve oral education and access.”

In January the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) announced its research funding rankings, placing us fourth in the country. Last year we were ranked seventh. This is an important milestone and certainly our recent NIH grant, which funds the new Southeast Center for Research to Reduce Oral Health Disparities, is highlighted in this issue, certainly played a part in our ranking improvement. This is especially important considering the highly competitive nature of securing NIH grant support.

In December we treated our first patient at the new NCEF Pediatric Dental Clinic in Naples and expect to see approximately 5,000 patient visits during the first year of operation. Within several years, with the addition of faculty and more continued positions, we will deliver 15,000 to 18,000 patient visits per year. The clinic is a valuable addition to Statewide Network for Community Oral Health because it makes a life-saving difference for thousands of children in the Naples area.

We’ve got some great events planned for our alumni, donor and friends as well. In this issue you learn more about Spring Synergy Weekend, a CE and networking weekend in Gainesville, where 350 attendees interacted with students and with members of the FDA’s Central Florida Dentistry Association. And make sure to plan for Homecoming Weekend. The 250 weekend packages, which includes tickets to Gator Game, post games with the dental fraternity, and the UF vs. Arkansas game, are likely to sell fast.

Why? It’s Gainesville. It’s football. It’s student. And it’s a great big Florida Game!

But first, on to the clinics.

Heart and hand cancer in the U.S.

Together, we take the BITE out of CANCER.

Each year, more than 11,000 people in the United States die because of head and neck cancer, and 34,000 cases are diagnosed. The statistics are clear, there are serious disparities in treatment and higher rates of mortality in the United States. Low incomes equal late detection and late detection reduces survival rates.

But, as Paul Brooker wrote in “Outrageous Misconceptions,” his book that cleared up absurd notions, “Tumors are human beings with the tails zapped off.”

“I heard that once before, a meeting and it just overwhelmed me. It encapsulates what this center is about. This is about the people affected by head and neck cancer. Most importantly it’s about reducing the number of people affected by doing research, reducing the number of tumors,” said Henrietta Logan, Ph.D., a professor in community dentistry and behavioral science, and the principal investigator for a $5.3 million National Institute of Health (NIH) grant in the UF College of Dentistry.

The grant, awarded in October 2008, funds a new multi-disciplinary research center aimed at reducing disparities in head and neck cancer survival through prevention and early detection in low income minority youth. Since 1993 the NIH has supported four regional research centers that focus on minority oral health problems with a goal of establishing an evidence base for the development of prevention and treatment regiments. This is the first NIH-funded center to focus on head and neck cancer in the southeast.

Officially called the Southeast Center for Research in Oral Health (SECOHR), Logan and her team have set out to “We’re taking the bite out of cancer. Because that’s really not our goal.”

The goal is early detection in at-risk groups but this information is powerless unless it gets to the right audience and creates action. In other words, at-risk people need to see it, believe it and take the steps to protect themselves. But we need to do it better. We need to do it faster. “It’s all too common that the one time in a lifetime target population might see a dentist during an emergency dental visit. If you tell me that the one time in a lifetime target population might see a dentist during an emergency dental visit.”

Logan and her team plan to leverage strong partnerships the college already enjoys within the university, the state and with many smaller, rural communities across the state. Center partners include the Florida Department of Health, Florida Dental Association, Florida State University, Florida A&M University, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR), State Oral Health Improvement Plan, Oral Cancer Working Group, AHA-Florida Chapter, and Oral-Nose (ACROD), and Regional Ministerial Networks.

Survival from head and neck cancer is one of the lowest among all malignancies; it has not improved in recent decades and remains around 50%.

To improve the effectiveness of various scientific health promotion models the center is organizing oral cancer screening clinics in locations such as rural health clinics, community centers and dentists. They will also be working to improve patient education tools and faculty. In future oral screening clinics we will compare attendance to determine which communications model increased the likelihood that African American men received an oral cancer screening.

This speaks to the type of research that is it active rather than passive, “We’re not just measuring. Every time we have a screening clinic, we’re reaching and we’re moving forward. That feels good,” said Logan.

The key for the center involves educating caregivers about the importance of performing an oral cancer screening on each patient, especially during an emergency dental visit.

“If it’s true that the one time of our target population might see a dentist during an emergency dental visit. Logans said, “I’m not necessarily saying that that patient will be in a dental chair for five years and a social marketing campaign might also improve oral health care, “Logan added.

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NCF Pediatric Dental Clinic opens

Collier County Campus of Edison State College, Naples, Florida

In December the NCF Pediatric Dental Clinic, the newest member of the UF-owned family of dental facilities around the state, opened. Welcome to your true pediatric dental home, and in doing so, opened a path of expanded access and healthcare for at-risk children in Collier County.

The clinic began with three UF College of Dentistry residents and two dentist assistants, and since the opening of the clinic, has seen over 1,000 patients. In June, the clinic plans to have 10 residents on staff along with pediatric faculty, a team that will help ensure that children in Collier County receive the dental care they need to have a healthy and successful start in life.

We expect that, within three or four years from now as fully funded, we will be able to accommodate over 5,000 patients a year,” said Lauren Greenhalgh, D.M.D., M.P.H., who is a faculty member at the college and serves as the clinic's director for the program.

The University of Florida received $4 million for construction of the clinic from the Naples Children and Education Foundation (NCEF). The NCEF donated an additional $5.5 million for startup costs to help fund operations for the first five years. The university was able to obtain matching grants of $4 million from the state's Alachua County Community Foundation as well as private foundations.

The clinic is being told by our alumni and friends, and by our students by regulating social and educational activities that carry meaning opportunities for you to get to know one another and learn from each other.

The D.M.D. students want to learn from you about things that aren’t part of the curriculum. How do you choose to pass on a skill? Would you share with other students? Is there a thing you wish you’d learned before graduation, what would you change?

The clinic will provide dental care free of charge for at-risk children in Collier County.

Spring Synergy Weekend

This spring we debuted our first-ever Spring Synergy Weekend, April 24 – 26, representing a collaboration between the Academy of Alumni and Friends, the college’s Continuing Dental program, the American Student Dental Association, and the Central Florida District of the Florida Dental Association. It was a “synergistic” weekend of dental activities including CE programs, a reception and free, fair networking opportunities, and a golf tournament for the golfers.

The second Spring Synergy Weekend is tentatively scheduled for March 19 and 20. In addition to having a CE program and the ADSA activities, the college will provide a round-up of other activities in the area and in other alumni forums.

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