State of the School 2015: Remarkable Accomplishments, Exceptional People

Summary of remarks by Dean Christian Stohler, Columbia University College of Dental Medicine, New York City, December 9, 2015

At our State of the School presentation, I discussed the many successes of the past calendar year and our ambitious goals for the future of the College of Dental Medicine with an audience including faculty, staff and students gathered in Alumni Auditorium at CUMC. I appreciate this opportunity to share this summary of my remarks with our alumni, supporters and friends, and I also invite you to view the full video presentation on this site. I’m grateful to Dr. Tom Magnani ’80 for making the introduction.

This has been a spectacular year for our College. I am especially gratified not only by how much we accomplished together in the past year, but that essentially the same team of faculty and staff who were in place when I joined CDM more than two years ago have been leading this progress. Sometimes institutions need to replace people in order to achieve meaningful change and innovation. It’s remarkable that we have not had to do that, and I hope that the CDM community shares my pride in that. I also appreciate the support of outside advisors and partners, some of whom I’ll discuss below.

In addition to the exceptional quality of students, faculty, clinicians, staff and alumni in the CDM community, key themes and announcements which I will briefly outline below include: new appointments and the assignment of new portfolios; realignment of our academic sections; our strong reputation and visibility; highly selective enrollment and outstanding placement of postdocs; robust and improving financial performance; significant progress in executing a vision-informed master space plan within the CUMC campus; and the growing importance of aligning with the work and values of the other schools and colleges within the Medical Center and Columbia University.

In 2014, my first full calendar year as Dean, much of our work was centered around gathering data and building an understanding regarding our future. In 2015, armed with data and plans, we jumped forward significantly in multiple ways.

New Appointments and Portfolios

To grow and to innovate, it was essential to realign the responsibilities of some of our key administrators. Important new portfolios include: Vice Dean Letty Moss-Salentijn, DDS, PhD, who also chairs the education committee at the University, in curriculum innovation and interprofessional education; Vice Dean Dr. Ronnie Myers, DDS ’79, Peds ’80 in project oversight, institutional metrics and compliance (article 28); Senior Associate Dean James Fine, DMD in pre-doctoral and post-graduate academic affairs; and Senior Associate Dean Sara Patterson, MPH in institutional advancement, corporate giving and communications. In new appointments, CUMC Vice President for Finance and Planning Wil McKoy has been spending 80% of his time as CDM Vice Dean for Finance and Administration, and Senior Associate Dean Evanthia Lalla, DDS ’06, MS has assumed a newly created role in faculty development. Novella Jones, who is very well-known in our profession, joined us from NYU in July as Director of Human Resources and Faculty Affairs.

Importantly, I’ve asked our administrators to collaborate more closely with their counterparts in CUMC and (in some cases) the University to best leverage our institution-wide resources and knowledge and to do business with greater efficiency.

I’ve come to realize that there is at least one whole new world which we and our peers in dental education don’t yet understand, and will need to, in order to thoroughly prepare our students for the future. To help address this, I have named Joseph V. Errante, DDS to a newly created position, Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Services. With a 30-year background in the dental group practice management and health insurance industries, Joe has a broad, deep and very rare understanding of the increasingly complex nature of the business side of our profession. Over the past several months, Joe has been and has been assisting us in a consulting capacity, providing extensive input on strategic planning for the College.

Joe’s responsibilities will include executive management and strategic leadership of all CDM clinical operations, including faculty practice, teaching clinics, and community clinics. He will be
charged with leading change management efforts to improve clinical performance in healthcare outcomes, compliance, and finance as well as in patient, student, and faculty satisfaction. Joe will collaborate with CDM faculty and administration to develop and implement transformative models of clinical care delivery, including those made possible by technological advances and those that are enabled by inter-professional practice. He will also source, develop, and execute partnerships with various external entities who are stakeholders in the future of dental practice. I am very excited that Joe has agreed to join our outstanding team.

Redefined Academic Sections

In order to train our students with broader and deeper knowledge to face the future and to increase efficiency, we have redefined the focus and structure of some of our academic sections. Under Dr. Burt Edelstein, the Section of Population Oral Health (SPOH) is examining its mission and focus, and is in discussions with the Mailman School of Public Health regarding creating a dual-degree doctoral program. SPOH now includes the Community DentCare program ably led by Dr. Joe McManus. Under Dr. Panos Papapanou, the Section of Oral, Diagnosis and Rehabilitation Sciences has a new focus on rehabilitation sciences and now includes the Divisions of Prosthodontics and AEGD. Led by Dr. Richard Lichtenthal, the Section of Cariology and Restorative Services has new arms in cariology, restorative sciences and eventually will in material sciences, and now includes the Division of Endodontics. The section will be introducing state-of-the-art simulation into the first two years of curriculum. Additionally, we've developed new predoctoral programs and revamped curriculum and rotation electives in all of our areas, including the sections mentioned above as well as the Section of Growth and Development and the Section of Hospital Dentistry.

As many of you know, we are in an accreditation year. Chaired by Vice Dean Ronnie Myers, our administrative team working to prepare for a September 2016 site visit includes Zoila Noguerole, Gary Hermann, Dr. Richard Abbott and two alumni with tremendous expertise who are supporting us on a consulting basis, Carolyn Gray, Hyg ’73, ’75 and James A. Lipton ’71, PhD. A steering committee on academics, also led by Dr. Myers, is reviewing our curriculum as it relates to the accreditation process.

Strong Reputation and Visibility

Being perceived as a leader in dental education is a high priority. I'm encouraged by CDM being included on many published rankings, including the 2015 QS ranking of the world's top dental schools, and of course Columbia University is commonly ranked as a world-class institution. However, rankings almost always are based on subjective data, including the emotions and personal preferences of voters. More objective is how we perform in areas such as grant and clinical trial awards and citations of academic papers produced by faculty, so I prefer to provide more detail on those metrics.

One measure of intellectual contribution by leaders are the number of R01 awards earned from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the award given to an independent investigator under the umbrella of a university. With the help of Dr. Jim Lipton, we looked at NIH grants awarded to dental, medical, nursing and public health schools at major universities over the past ten years, and found that CDM is in the second highest quartile, well above the median. I am very encouraged by this, given that we are a relatively small operation with fewer scientists than other schools. Not surprisingly, Columbia's medical, nursing and public health schools each are in the highest quartile, one of many reasons why it's in our benefit to increase our interprofessional curriculum and collaborations with these schools, which I discuss elsewhere in these remarks.

Citation of papers produced by our faculty is another factor which measures our impact and demonstrates the importance of the science we create. Looking at the top dental schools whose faculty have been cited since 2005, CDM is second only behind Harvard, and in front of Penn, Michigan, UCSF and UCLA (Source: Web of Science). Again, considering our relatively small size and funding resources compared to those other institutions, this is stellar performance. In addition to Drs. Papapanou and Lalla, I would like to thank the research faculty for their accomplishments, including Dr. Yiping Han, [one name TK], Dr. Milly Embree and particularly, Dr. Chang Lee, whose innovative work with Dr. Jeremy Mao on the regeneration of meniscus has been covered widely in the media.
Additionally, another strong indicator is the percent increase of our NIH award portfolio over time. From fiscal year (FY) 2013 to FY14, our portfolio grew by almost 52%, and looking at FY15 through October 2015, we are up more than 122%, surpassing Harvard at 73.4%.

Enrolling and Placing Top Students

We continue to attract the very best students. Overall enrollment at dental schools across the U.S. has been steadily increasing, however in order to retain our level of quality and faculty-to-student ratio we have no immediate plans to increase enrollment at CDM. I was pleased to see that in a new "Smart Rank" for the class of 2018, which looks at GPA, DAT, acceptance rate and class size, CDM is in the top 10, surpassing Harvard at #12, and we surpass all of the top 10 schools as well as Harvard in DAT (Source: StartClass).

Looking at our specific enrollment data, I'm proud to say that the Class of 2019 is the best year in our history in terms of enrolling underrepresented minorities (21%).

Of course, students enroll here for a particular outcome, to prepare for the profession and/or for further education. With the exception of Harvard, no other dental school prepares more students for postdoctoral education - 95% of the Class of 2015 is pursuing this. In the same class, 100% of Oral Surgery students - 15 out of 15 - matched. We just received data on the Class of 2016, where 81% of students in Orthodontics, a highly competitive specialty, matched.

Improved Financial Performance

Our operating results are strong, with total revenues rising 9.4% (about $5.8 million) in FY15 compared to FY14. During the same period, expenses rose by only 5.3% (about $3.2 million). Our net surplus has been bigger than we've seen in a long time, $3.7 million, a 227% increase compared to FY14 ($1.1 million). In terms of revenue sources, the largest increases have been from gifts (26.7%), clinic (15.8%), faculty practice (13.8%) and private grants (12%). Contrary to what some students might believe, net tuition revenue increased by only 3.3%. We also saw significant increases at the number of procedures at the clinic.

Programming Our Future:
A Vision-Informed Master Space Plan

Our physical presence within the Columbia University Medical Center is one of our most important assets, and we are poised to better capitalize on that. Working with two architectural firms who have broad and deep experience in large-scale, technology-oriented health and science teaching, research and patient care spaces, and with input from CUMC architects and our own faculty and students, we are linking our vision and goals with the space we already have as well as newly acquired space within CUMC.

Part of our vision is to be technology driven in education and patient care - to be an innovative and distinctive leader in simulation learning and digital dentistry. We also need to address practical issues, such as: Who absolutely needs to remain in the existing main building? What are the optimal traffic solutions for people and transportation routes for instrumentation, including the potential for robotic delivery and supply restocking systems? Where should we place particular units depending on their communication, interaction, security and public-access needs?

We are aligning our vision with our space over a number of phases, including new space on VC-5 and a much-expanded VC-7. Additionally, in 2016 we will announce a "TBD" space outside the CUMC campus and I will give you an update on our initiatives in West Harlem.

Our College depends and thrives on the intellect and innovation surrounding us at CUMC. My recommendation is to solidify our presence here, and that we continue to follow the standard that we set, which is that dental education cannot be wholly distinct from medical education.

Increasing Alignment with CUMC and Columbia University
As stated earlier, our collaboration with our CUMC and University counterparts helps us to do business with greater efficiency, and in terms of curriculum, there are multiple opportunities to grow and innovate. Each of my fellow deans at CUMC is fully committed to interprofessional education.

As professionals working within two large institutions, CUMC and Columbia University, we also are obligated to demonstrate to those institutions that the mission, values and strategic priorities of our College are fully aligned with theirs. In our work, we fully endorse the values supported by the University, including preeminence in science, social justice, community transformation and having a global impact. Our strategic initiatives are aligned, including understanding and contributing to big data and data sciences, precision medicine, global engagement, social justice and climate change. We are proceeding to establish metrics around some of these, including global engagement. As we work with the University on its next development campaign, we need to be inside and aligned with the institution’s thinking on strategic priorities and initiatives.

Building Our Future: Internal and External Collaboration

In closing, I owe thanks to so many people, including several who support us from outside the walls of the College and University. Our Board of Advisors, chaired by Les Seldin ’66 and composed of alumni and other leaders in our profession, continues to provide wise and important counsel. Within the Board, Steven Kess of Henry Schein, Inc. is helping us create and market initiatives in population health and access to care. Jim Lipton, who I’ve already mentioned, is helping us understand and position our role in contributing to preeminence in science. Dr. Madeline Monaco has been working with Dr. Evie Lalla in giving us feedback on global initiatives and how to position ourselves in the international marketplace. Dr. Fotinos S. Panagakos will be working with us on expanding our role in community transformation, particularly in Northern Manhattan.

Julie Connolly ’01, Perio ’05 has done a fantastic job as President of our Alumni Association. Michael Leifert, Ortho ’04 has assumed that role, working with Michelle Mirsky ’77 as Vice President, Sean Adler, Peds ’04 as Treasurer and Abraham Chahine ’09 as Secretary. I thank all of them for their support and input.

Recently, Dr. Evie Lalla organized our first Dean’s Honors Day which recognized faculty who achieved new responsibilities, promotions and tenure and earned awards within and outside the University over the past two years, and we plan to continue this annually. Now in its 25th year, our annual Employee Recognition Day honored so many talented and passionate staff members who ably support many functions across the College. I was very pleased that Dean Lee Goldman and CUMC recently recognized the Supervisor of our Central Sterilization Unit, Iris Cirino, with the Baton Award for exceptional teamwork.

Of course, our students and former students are the heart of our College. We continue to provide a distinctive and innovative learning environment for our students, as well as transformative research and exceptional patient care. I hope you share our pride in our success, our strong reputation and our excitement as we approach our 100th year. It is fitting that I delivered this presentation in Alumni Auditorium, as so much of what I’ve reported is happening because of our alumni, partners and friends. Thank you for your support.

Warmest regards,
Christian Stohler, DMD, DrMedDent
Dean
Columbia University College of Dental Medicine