College of Dentistry - Sharjah University welcomes new dean

By Dental Tribune Middle East

SARJAH, UAE: Professor Richard J. Simonsen, DDS, MS, on behalf of Dental Tribune would like to congratulate you with your new role as the Dean of the College of Dentistry and Executive Director of the Dental Hospital at Sharjah University in UAE.

D. T. M. E.: How did you find your way to the Middle East, through Kuwait, to Sharjah, UAE?

Professor Simonsen: Thank you very much for this opportunity. I have always had an adventurous streak in me and circumstances, like the end of World War II when I was born, meant that as a small boy I lived in two countries; England where I was born; and Norway where my parents, as a teenager, decided that I wanted to study dentistry, and I wanted to make it in the United States. I was very fortunate to get that opportunity through a series of serendipitous events. So having lived and worked in several countries, and having lectured now in about 35 countries, where the opportunity arose to spend the tail-end of my academic career in the Middle East, where I had never been, I jumped at it. I believe one should always take such opportunities to grow, and learn. I wanted to see for myself, rather than rely on the news reports, just what the people of the Middle East are really like. Already I know that this was a very wise decision because I have learned so much about the wonderful people, the places, and the politics of the region. Being in Sharjah at this moment in time, at this moment in my life, surrounded by the bright young minds of our students, is a very special experience for me. I feel so very lucky to be here!

What advice can you provide the students on bridging the gap between post-graduation and working as a full-time dentist?

Well, our students here are regarded as a lower form of the customers of the University. I would like to motivate our students to continue doing the right thing. Bring yourself, rather than rely on the people around you, to help them improve. With our dedicated core of University leadership from the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor to the dental faculty and staff that we have at the University of Sharjah, I predict a bright future. One of my roles as I see it is faculty development. As we grow, we will need some additional faculty, but more importantly we need new and experienced mentors. So I would advise them to recognize that once a dental student, always a student of dentistry. We are in a profession where we continue learning for a life-time, and that makes it very exciting indeed!

Based on your own experience how did you proceed after graduating?

I found a niche for myself. Recognizing that it is hard to be an expert in every area of general dentistry, I focused on the acid-etch technique, which was a relatively new concept when I graduated from dental school. I looked for ways to minimize the loss of tooth structure in preventive and restorative dentistry. That’s my passion—conservation of tooth structure, and I would encourage any graduate to find their niche in dentistry, and become as good as you possibly can be in that area, which, as it was in my case, may require additional education in a graduate program.

Do you have anything else you would like to share with the readers?

I believe that any school lives for its students. If you want to put it in lay terms; the students are the customers of the University. We exist for them and we should not go back to the old days when students were regarded as a lower form of life until one day they graduated and became instant colleagues! Of course young people need guidance, advice and mentoring, but they also need our respect, empathy and just plain kindness at times. I have been amazed at what a remarkable organization of students we have here in the University of Sharjah Dental Students Association! They have a very well-organized group of young people with a mission to do their best. I want them to leave the University of Sharjah with warm feelings for the institution of education so that they perhaps can one day teach the next generation of colleagues to work for the people of Sharjah and the Emiratis as faculty at the University of Sharjah College of Dentistry.