The Dawson Academy: Changing dentists’ lives

(Dr. Peter E. Dawson is considered to be one of the most influential clinicians and teachers in the history of dentistry. Thirty years ago, Dr. Dawson founded the Dawson Center for Advanced Dental Study in St. Petersburg, Fla., to teach dentists how to provide complete dentistry using time-tested principles. During this year’s Mid-Winter Meeting in Chicago, Dr. Dawson announced the merger of the Dawson Center with Cranham Dental Seminars of Chesapeake, Va., and the Lee Culp’s Institute for Oral Art and Design of Sarasota, Fla., as well as the addition of Dr. Henry Gremillion to his leadership team forming The Dawson Academy. Based out of St. Petersburg, The Dawson Academy is dedicated to teaching the principles and skills necessary for the successful practice of complete, quality and predictable dentistry with primary concentration in occlusion, the temporomandibular joints and comprehensive restorative dentistry. The Academy covers four areas of study: the Core Curriculum, Advanced Restorative Principles and Procedures, Dental Medicine, and Practice and Professional Growth. The Dawson Academy leadership team includes Director Dr. Dawson; President and CEO Joan S. Forrest; Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs Henry A. Gremillion, DDS; Director of Innovation and Technology Lee Culp, CDT; Director of Education John C. Cranham, DDS; Director of Faculty Glenn DuPont, DDS; and Chairman of the Dawson Foundation DeWitt Wilkerson, DMD. Dental Tribune had a chance to interview The Dawson Academy’s leadership team and discussed the merger and the Academy’s future. This is an exciting time for the Dawson Academy. What led to the merger?

Director Dr. Dawson: For many years, we functioned as the Dawson Center. As the years went by, we continued to expand our curriculum because there have been so many innovations in the dental industry. We had to incorporate our basic principles and lend them to these new concepts and innovations. It’s amazing how far the dental industry has come. These innovations include new technology and materials. The only way to make sense of all of this is to bring in more expert faculty members who are currently practicing what they are preaching. The Dawson Academy’s faculty has an incredible amount of talent, which now puts them in a leadership and ownership capacity.

How did you find these new leadership team members?

Dr. Dawson: They are not new to me. They’ve all worked with me for years, and I’ve watched them progress into some of the most well respected key opinion leaders in dentistry. I’m thrilled to watch them in lectures and hands-on courses, and see them teach the principles that I’ve been teaching all these years. They combine my principles with new techniques and use new materials. I stand back and watch knowing what they are saying is correct.

What is your greatest satisfaction?

Dawson: There’s nothing better than having dentists come up and tell me that I changed their lives. Besides teaching time-tested principles on being a better dentist, we teach quality control of everything: from the dentistry they practice and how they run their office, to having a balanced schedule with more time for their families. Dentists are spending too many hours at their practice, which takes time away from their families. If you practice what we teach, you won’t have to do the same procedures over and over again; you will have a more productive practice, which means you’ll be able to...
go home and spend more time with family. If dentists are not happy at home, then they are not going to be happy in their dental practice and there’s no reason why they can’t have a very successful practice and a very successful home life. They can practice ethical dentistry, run a successful practice and perform the procedures the patient needs and perform them well.

Tell us more about the Dawson-Schein Educational Initiative. How did this come about?

Dawson: This initiative is the perfect match for us. We’ve always been free of any commercial involvement. Now that we are dealing with a company like Henry Schein, they service all different types of procedures, technology, materials and products.

This still allows us to be completely free of commercial involvement. I would have loved to have had all these materials years ago.

With all the new technology and materials out there, if a dentist isn’t combining these materials with solid dentistry, they are only practicing bad dentistry. That’s what we don’t want to see happen.

We want to be right there and, with this initiative, we are able to marry basic principles and new technology together and expand the level of quality that has never been seen before. Starting later in the year, we will offer classes through this initiative called “Foundations for Success: Integrating Today’s Technologies for Predictable Results.” These courses will be offered in multiple locations around the country.

What will dentists and other students get out of this new curriculum?

President and CEO Joan Forrest: When our students come to our courses, they learn “complete dentistry.” We’re not only talking about the masticatory system, but the completeness of being a leader, being a business person, a clinician and feeling good about the profession. Dentists come out of dental school with enough dental training to get started, but they are not taught the business side or how to talk to patients.

Can you tell us more about why The Dawson Academy decided to join forces with Cranham Dental Seminar and Lee’s Institute, and invited Dr. Gremillion to join your team?

Forrest: John has done fantastic work with contemporary esthetics. He took Pete’s Seminar One class 20 years ago. I had heard of John, but never met him until three years ago. After I heard him lecture, I knew we needed him on our team.

Lee is a world-renowned dental technician. He’s an inventor and materials expert, and he’s a prolific writer. He understands how technology is helping dentistry. What we did is create courses that teach students how to implement technology into their practice. There also needs to be a partnership with the dentist, the lab and the specialist.

They all need to collaborate on a patient’s needs, and that brings us to Dr. Gremillion. His expertise is in oral facial pain, anatomy, solving problems with pain, headaches and sleep disorders. He is at the forefront of where dentistry is headed, and that’s dental medicine. Dentists should have some study of the entire masticatory system and facial area, and that’s why we developed a curriculum track with Dr. Gremillion called Dental Medicine.

How do you convince people that the Dawson Academy’s curriculum is right for them?

Forrest: They must decide what they are looking for. If they are looking for a “quick fix” or technique that they can apply in their practice the next day, than that’s not us. If they are looking to continue their professional development, continue what they started in dental school and learn to become a complete, comprehensive dentist, how to balance their work and family life, then we are the right place. With the development of our programs, it’s also our goal to make sure students implement what they learn in our courses. We’ll keep that going in a number of ways.

We provide a variety of hands-on courses and virtual classrooms to keep doctors connected not only with us, but with other students and teachers, study clubs and our alumni association. This helps them remain in our “Community of Learning.” Our strategic vision is to have multiple teaching facilities around the country. We currently have facilities in St. Petersburg, Fla., and Chesapeake, Va. We want to bring our message to the students so they don’t always have to come to us. We have our first curriculum courses being offered overseas this summer in the United Kingdom, and we named our first international faculty member, Dr. Ian Buckle of Thornton Hough, United Kingdom.