

# REACHING GREATER HEIGHTS IN DENTAL EDUCATION: TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENT

*Abd. Kadir R. Reaching greater heights in dental education: twenty five years of achievement, Annals Dent. Univ Malaya 1997; 4: 1.*

Dental education in Malaysia had gone a long way since its first inception at the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore (part of then Malaya) in 1927 with an enrolment of six students, all of whom unfortunately left after the first year. The School was later reinstated with the appointment of the first Dean, Prof EK Tratman in 1929 who saw to the first batch of qualified dentists in 1934. The objective of the Dental School was to provide educational opportunities that would serve as a means of achieving progress at personal and community levels, as well as to meet the growing needs of the country in terms of professional oral care.

When it seemed that the separation of Singapore from Malaysia became inevitable, University of Malaya whose main campus was in Singapore then decided to split with the Singapore campus being renamed University of Singapore while the Kuala Lumpur branch was established and retained the original name in January 1962. This move also saw to the establishment of a new Faculty of Dentistry, temporarily housed in the Faculty of Medicine, in November 1971. Along with the establishment of the new faculty, the appointment of the first administrative Dean, the late Prof Ibrahim Haji Mohammad Yassin was made. Later, he was joined by a handful of academic staffs in March 1972. In May the same year, the first batch of 32 students was taken in. In addition, the construction of the Faculty building, located next to the University Hospital, first planned in early 1972, finally took off in February 1973. It was with great pride thus when on 24th of November 1973, the Faculty saw the laying of the Foundation Stone by the late Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Datuk Hussien Onn. The Faculty was once again honoured by the visit of the late Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Tun Haji Abdul Razak bin Datuk Hussein who formally officiated the opening of the faculty on 19th May, 1975. The excitement finally escalated in June 1976 when the University saw its first batch of dentists leaving the walls of the Faculty to serve the country.

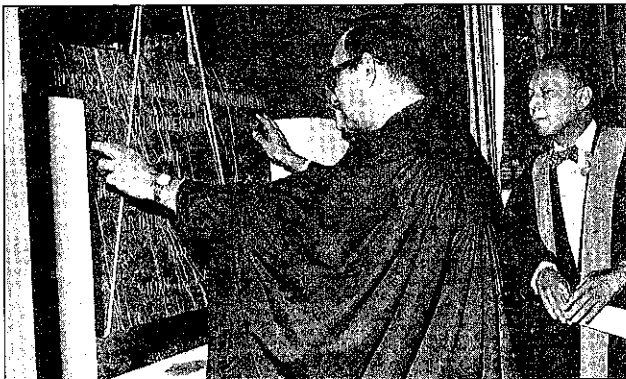
Since then, the Faculty had seen several changes. Realising the critical need for more dental professional manpower, the number of students enrolled increased to 48 in

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1984 and later to 64 a few years later. Today, the Faculty had been responsible in producing some 1000 dentists for Malaysia. As enrolment increased, so was there a need to add new wings and made way for renovations to the infrastructure of the original building. This was carried out in two phases, once in 1981 and again in 1995. Along with these structural changes, the faculty also saw a gradual increase in academic staffs in six disciplines, namely Children Dentistry and Orthodontics; Community Dentistry; Conservative Dentistry; Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery; Oral Pathology and Oral Medicine and, Prosthetic Dentistry. The years of change also saw a review of curriculum for undergraduate education moving from four to five years in 1995. Along with this change too saw the addition of the seventh discipline in the Faculty, the Department of Oral Biology.

As she celebrated her Silver Jubilee in 1996, the Faculty of Dentistry proudly looked back to see new programmes being added to its curriculum, namely; post-graduate studies in Doctor of Philosophy (1990), Masters in Community Dentistry (1994), Masters of Science in all disciplines (1996), Masters of Clinical Dentistry and the Primary Fellowship Programme of the Royal College of Surgeons, England (FDSRCS), as well as the development of educational and research cooperations with several overseas universities in the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Germany, New Zealand and Indonesia among others. The establishment of these international collaborations had been attributed largely to the Faculty's ability to maintain its high academic standards, able leadership, scholarly staff commitment and keen sense of learning among its students.

Thus as the Faculty moves into the next millennium, it is this dynamism that will continue to see the Faculty preparing to move ahead to greater heights to live up to her vision to be a Centre of Academic, Professional and Research Excellence not only within this region but more so globally.



Laying of the foundation stone



Official opening of the Faculty