

DCDS Connection

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Great Expectations

DCDS/ICD's Award-Winning Mentoring Program Generates National Interest

by Roger E. Alexander, DDS, Editor

DCDS member and International College of Dentists (ICD) Fellow Dr. Moody Alexander had great hopes for the new program for dental students that he proposed back in 2007, but we're pretty sure he had no idea that he was starting an extracurricular program that could well become a fixture at a majority of dental schools in America! There has been an increasing concern in dentistry regarding a perception that ethics and professionalism have taken a backseat to profit-making in some areas of dentistry. For several years, the American and International Colleges of Dentists have taken a lead role in promoting and stressing ethics and leadership in dentistry, so this program seemed to be a natural fit with those areas of emphasis.

As President of the Texas Section of ICD, Dr. Moody Alexander was looking for a leadership project and proposed a program that would introduce beginning dental students to faculty and practicing members of their future profession who had established reputations for practicing with the highest ethical and professional standards. His inspiration came during a leadership class that was sponsored by the Dallas County Dental Society (DCDS) and conducted by ICD Fellow Dr. Lynne Gerlach and Dr. Peter DeLisle of Austin College's Posey Leadership Institute. In essence, his idea was to expose dental students to positive professional role models who they would hopefully emulate during their training and after they graduate. The program would enable successful dentists to share critical skills and thinking that will help those students to become successful. Meetings were arranged with Dr. Jack Long, Associate Dean for Student Affairs at Baylor College of



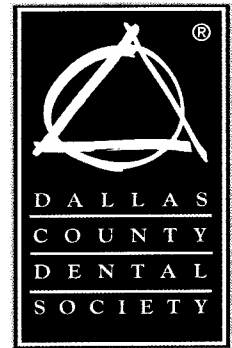
Dr. William Gerlach meets with his group of Baylor D1 students.

Dentistry (BCD), who suggested involving the freshmen students (or so-called "D1" students) and exposing them to exemplary professional attitudes and behavior from the very beginning of their professional training. Ms. Moira Allen, BCD's Director of Student Affairs, suggested using a small group approach rather than large meetings.

At an early organizational meeting, ICD President-elect Dr. John Chandler of Huntsville proposed the name "Great Expectations" and Dr. Mark Gannaway, BCD's Director of Comprehensive Care in the Department of Restorative Sciences, volunteered to become the Program Director for the faculty-driven program. Dr. Alexander also wisely solicited the support of the Dallas County Dental Society's Board of Directors, because its membership had a large pool of ICD Fellows who could be asked to volunteer as mentors for the program.

Now in its second year, the "Great Expectations Mentoring Professional Behavior Program for Dental Students" has tweaked the interest of a large number of dental societies and dental schools across the nation, some of whom are now investigating starting similar programs in their own dental schools. A Golden Apple Award from the American Dental

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Mission Statement

Dallas County Dental Society is the voice of dentistry in the area, committed to promoting high ethical standards and pursuing excellence in advocacy, community service and education.

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Association was presented to DCDS by our Trustee, Dr. Jerry Long of Houston, for our involvement in the program last year. The program was a big topic of discussion at the 2008 meeting of dental society Executive Directors in Chicago.

The extracurricular program is built around the concept of small group, interactive learning rather than "presentations." D1 students at BCD who volunteered for the program (last year, more than 94% of the class) were split up into 12 groups, partially based on their expressed professional interests. Groups of eight to nine D1 students were matched with one or two volunteer faculty, practicing ICD dentists from DCDS, one senior dental student, and one junior dental student. One of the most positive aspects of the program is seeing how the student-mentors have enjoyed helping their fellow students and how enthusiastically they've gotten involved with their groups of D1 students. They remember how they felt when they were first year students and how they appreciated help from faculty and more-experienced students.

There are a few large planned events each year for all groups, but the remainder of the meetings and agendas are established by the individual groups and their mentors, including office visits to the dental practices of the participating local dentists. Topics that a group might decide to discuss at their periodic small-group meetings are things such as ethical decision-making, time management, leadership, stress management, benefits of organized dentistry, professional integrity, lifelong learning, goal setting, professional values and so on. Students are encouraged to seek help at any time from their BCD faculty mentor or the assigned volunteer junior or senior dental students.

In the future, as the program matures, it is anticipated that many of the present D1 members of the program will become the future junior and senior mentors, passing the skills and knowledge they have learned now to future freshman dental students.

Founder Dr. Moody Alexander states "there is something about food and small groups that helps nurture camaraderie and gets everyone in the mood for a fun exchange

of ideas." Dr. Alexander also was impressed at one of the group gatherings when a first year student was discussing her visit to the office of Drs. William and Lynne Gerlach, and the student made the following observation: "...if you don't have honesty and integrity you'll never succeed with your patients!" It was an astute observation for someone who is at the very beginning of her career and has not yet seen her first patient!

Mentors to the program are unpaid. They participate because they want to help the new dental students get off to a good start in school and serve as role models who will help shape attitudes of ethical, professional dental practice in the students' minds early in their careers. It is too early to know just how much of an impact this early mentoring will have, but the initial impressions suggest that this approach is extremely effective.

Presently, DCDS members/ICD Fellows participating in the "Great Expectations" program are: Drs. Patricia Blanton, Brad Crump, Arlet Dunsworth, Mark Geller, Lynne Gerlach, William Gerlach, Dale Greer, Larry Herwig, Frank Higginbottom, Hilton Israelson, James (Dean) Jensen, Linda Niessen, Tim Robinson, Kevin Seidler, Michael Stuart, Robert Walker and Jon Williamson.

BCD Faculty members who were selected to assist in the program are Drs. Moody Alexander, Stan Ashworth, Richard Ceen, George Cramer, Rena D'Souza, Mark Gannaway, Stephen Griffin, Robert Hinton, Robert Hutchins, Hershall Leineweber, Michael McWatters, Emet Schneiderman, Robert Spears, and Beverly York.

This year's program was kicked off on October 2, 2008 at the DCDS Executive Office with a dinner for the D1 class for this coming year: steak and all the trimmings! A number of dignitaries flew in for the dinner including TDA President Hilton Israelson, ADA Trustee Jerry Long, and ICD President John Chandler, each of whom briefly spoke to the students. The students split up into their 12 groups, met their mentors for the coming year and made plans for their future group meetings.

There is a great expectation (pun intended!) that this program could potentially become

an exciting part of the learning experiences of every dental student in the country as the excitement generated by our local program spreads by word of mouth from school to school and dental society to dental society. This is an opportunity for dentists all over the country who are located near dental schools to step up and start a similar program with their dental schools. What started as an idea for a local project has given birth to something that may become a major legacy to our profession for decades to come and assures the continued integrity of dental practitioners. Our thanks to Dr. Moody Alexander and all of the volunteers in this program, who are visible role models of excellence for BCD students to emulate.

ON BEHALF OF THE
DALLAS COUNTY DENTAL SOCIETY
AND THE
CENTENNIAL GALA COMMITTEE,
WE WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANK
YOU TO THE COMPANIES AND
INDIVIDUALS WHOSE DONATION
HELPED MAKE THE 100 YEAR
CELEBRATION A SUCCESS.

Brasseler USA
DENTSPLY International
Grand Staff Piano Center
Henry Schein Dental
James French Photography
Jay Kay Press
Medical Protective
Med-Tech Construction, Inc.
Nobel Biocare
Times Ten Wine Cellars
United Community Bank
Urban Flowers

1/8/09

Hi Marc -

Couldn't help but share
this with you!

You guys that know how to
write amaze me -- Roger is no
relation but I wish he were,
(should be able to spell it)

I feel embarrassed to
see all the credit they (and you guys)
are giving me. But it does seem
like it's creating some interest
around the country.

When I read about leadership I
couldn't help ^{but} think of you & I loved it
when he mentioned ACD. Maybe if they
(authors) say ^{it} it's O.K. and ^{it} we are super
careful we're O.K. I thank,

Moody

