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

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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 appoint-
ment of the first administrative Dean, the late Prof Ibrahim
Haji Mohammad Yassin was made. Later, he was joined by
a handful of academic staff 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 Hussen 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 man-
power, the number of students enrolled increased to 48 in
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 infrastruc-
ture 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 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 develop-
ment of educational and research cooperations with sev-
eral overseas universities in the United Kingdom, Japan,
Australia, South Africa, Germany, New Zealand and
Indonesia among others. The establishment of these inter-
national 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 prepar-
ing 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.