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Schulich Medicine & Dentistry: Progress through Partnership

Dentistry is the oral health specialty within medicine. Unfortunately, the natural linkage that exists between dentistry and other medical specialties is limited by certain barriers within the traditional university setting. We believe that the merger of the University of Western Ontario's dental and medical schools has produced many beneficial outcomes. We have streamlined administrative services, which has increased opportunity for scholarly productivity, provided the financial support of a larger enterprise and created core educational and research facilities that would not have been otherwise available to the dental school alone. By respecting differences while encouraging synergy, we have created a model that other dental schools may wish to consider.

Our merger has been grounded in a shared mission — to provide outstanding education within a research-intensive environment where tomorrow's physicians, dentists and scientists promote social responsibility, accountability and ethical responsibility for the advancement of human health.

Within this environment, interdisciplinary collaboration is encouraged and research teams develop naturally. Such teams can be successful in obtaining external grant funding that in the past may have been out of reach for dental scientists. For instance, the CIHR Group in Skeletal Development and Remodelling is an internationally recognized research unit involving scientists and clinicians from dentistry, physiology and pharmacology, as well as anatomy and cell biology.

In a traditional medical school, physicians generally had limited exposure to oral health. Yet, as many Canadians are medically and pharmacologically compromised and experience oral health problems that further negatively affect their health status, physicians need to under-

stand that dentists are expert colleagues with whom they must collaborate to provide optimal patient care. In our merged environment, there is more opportunity to ensure that physicians and dentists appreciate the integral relationship of oral and systemic disease and the relationship of oral health to wellness and overall health.

Our partnership also extends to our dental students and alumni. The Dental Student Society helps to raise the community's "dental IQ" through education initiatives and by providing care for patients in need. The society also actively supports our Endowment to Enhance Clinical Dentistry. Our students tell us they feel like equal partners in their education. They have confidence in our ability to adapt and to provide them with the skills and tools they need to become successful practitioners.

We are fortunate to have alumni who have remained loyal supporters of the school, providing financial support and dedicating their time as clinical instructors for our students. Without their help, we could not function. Over half of our financial support comes directly from our alumni, in the form of scholarships, awards, bursaries and designated gifts. This crucial support has enabled us to renovate our main clinic and allows us to continue to recruit and retain full-time dental educators and scientists.

In keeping with our mission, Schulich Dentistry is taking responsibility for helping to fill the gaps in oral health care for Canadians. We are working with the University of Toronto faculty of dentistry to develop and operate community outreach clinics in conjunction with rural hospitals in Ontario. Nationally, Schulich Dentistry continues to foster strong partnerships with other dental schools to ensure that all people living in Canada receive the oral health care they need, regardless of their means. We are fortunate to have best practice models set forth by McGill University's faculty of dentistry to emulate as we establish our community dentistry outreach programs.

We invite alumni from all Canadian dental schools and professional dental organizations to join us as we advocate for dental education and oral health research at the local and federal government levels, so that we may continue to contribute to the health and well-being of Canadians.

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