

**THE OREGON HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY**

**SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY**

**A HISTORY**

**1984 - 1998**

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With the attainment of university status in 1991 it became clear that the Oregon Health Sciences University intended to have a greater presence in the State of Oregon as well as strive for recognition as one of the premier medical centers in the country. As the search for the new dean of the dental school began, President Leonard Laster confided that he thought the next dean should be selected from outside the school. The overwhelming choice of the search committee, composed of faculty, members of the practicing profession, and students, was Henry J. VanHassel, D.D.S., M.S.D., Ph.D.

Dean VanHassel was a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Dentistry. He received his Master's degree in Endodontics from the University of Washington Dental School and later a Ph.D. in Physiology from that same institution. Upon graduation from dental school he entered the United States Public Health Service and spent his service career at the USPHS hospital in Seattle. The Public Health Service encouraged affiliation with the University of Washington and "Hank" (a name he much preferred even when he became dean), quickly moved up to Associate Professor rank in both the departments of

Endodontics and Physiology. It was here that he became associated with Dr. Arthur Brown, professor of physiology, later to become his Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Oregon. Hank became imbued with the research process and spirit. It was also at this time that he first recognized the strategic importance of research as a vital ingredient needed for a school to become a respected and integral part of a major university environment. With his retirement from the USPHS he was offered a faculty position as Professor of Endodontics at his alma mater in Maryland where he later became chairman of the Department. In his four years at Maryland Dr. VanHassel was recognized as having a talent for administration and he realized he enjoyed it. As his responsibilities increased he was able to develop innovative ways to solve various budget and management problems. It was from the University of Maryland he was recruited to begin on November 1, 1984 as the sixth dean of the Oregon Health Sciences University School of Dentistry.

The faculty and staff soon learned that the new dean was serious about being called just "Hank" and, though awkward for those more inclined to the trappings of academia, the name became a part of the tradition of the school. In many ways the informality of the name became a harbinger of his administrative style. He was a man completely devoid of any interest in the pomp and pageantry of the deanship. He traveled as little as possible. He much preferred a very hands-on approach within the school where he roamed the halls in his white coat calling each of the students by name and showing sincere interest in their well-being.

He insisted on teaching on the clinic floor and was greatly admired by faculty and students alike for his "no nonsense" approach to the clinical aspects of his specialty of endodontics. Dean VanHassel became known for his "quick study" of each problem that presented itself. He was not one to appoint numerous committees nor to evolve a lot of "process" before implementing new ideas or change. When considering a particular task about to be handled, his attempt, whenever possible, was to solve more than one problem with each decision. He continually amazed his administrative staff with his ability to analyze problems very quickly and precisely and to come up with unique solutions. On many occasions he would retreat to his office to focus on a particular problem for a period of time accepting no phone calls or interruptions. It was on these occasions when his Associate Dean for Administrative Affairs, Joe Consani, would announce "The Dean is in one of his quiet periods - be prepared!" The staff never knew what to expect when he came out of his office but it was sure to be unusual. One of these early quiet periods had to do with a proposal for a competitive national grant.

In the spring of 1995 the Pew (a family name) National Foundation announced it would accept competitive applications for grants to dental schools which would demonstrate the best ways for schools to educate dentists for the future. Twenty-seven schools were to receive \$100,000 pilot grants and, after the first round, the best five projects would receive grants up to \$1 million each. Dean VanHassel devised a plan for an extramural fellowship program which would

place a new dental graduate in a mentor dentist office for one year after graduation. This would provide a paid transition year for the graduate and promote guidance in the business aspects of operating a dental office. After input by the faculty and advice from members of the practicing profession, the plan was presented in grant form. The school's plan was chosen not only for the first round of grants, but was one of the five schools selected nationally to receive a full grant. The program was placed under the direction of Dr. Arthur Retzlaff, the former chairman of the Pediatric Dentistry department and operated for the next five years. As a program it was very successful both for the young graduates and the mentor dentists. It started at a time when positions in the profession were not easily obtained and students saw it as a form of advanced practical training with pay. By the end of the five years students had so many opportunities upon graduation that the stipend-level pay did not remain as attractive. Although considered a great success by all who reviewed it, the program closed for lack of interest on the part of the new graduates.

Another "quiet period" for the Dean evolved around his concern for the student experience. He insisted that ways be found to "cut the paper chase" in the clinics and wanted a more student-aware faculty. With the assistance of his Associate Dean for Clinic Affairs, Dr. Jack Clinton he encouraged a deemphasis of strict departmental requirements and looked for ways for the administration, the faculty, and staff to shown greater concern for developing a more collegial atmosphere within the school. Of his many accomplishments as Dean, Hank

VanHassel will probably be remembered best for his efforts to improve and humanize the student's educational condition within the school.

There were not many new or innovative curriculum ideas flowing through the field of dental education in the mid 1980's, but a grave concern was being recognized in the form of the crowded curriculum. At OHSU the students were in class over 35 hours per week. It seemed that there was more and more to teach but the curriculum committee could find few places to cut. As a result students were greatly over encumbered during the normal school year and were now attending summer sessions in three of the four years. The dean was especially concerned with the first semester of dental school which was crowded and stressful and heavily oriented to the basic sciences. One day he came out of his office with a scheme to have the freshman class start six weeks earlier in the year than normal and then take only gross anatomy during that period. This plan was implemented. Students attended didactic instruction and lab in the mornings and had the afternoons for self study and additional lab work. The program found great favor with the students as it freed up the first year curriculum and made it a less arduous entry into dental school and the dental profession.

*Student life*

The OHSU School of Dentistry has never been well funded. Studies by the American Dental Association showed by the late 1980's that the School was the least funded public dental school in the country in terms of state support-per-

student. It became apparent that if the school were to gain a better margin of support it would have to look to other less traditional sources. The University as a whole was struggling over finances and encouraged the pursuit of research grants and contracts. For its research effort the school had been relying almost exclusively on funded projects by Dr. David Mahler in dental materials, Drs. Walter Gabler and Thomas Schearer in biochemistry, Dr. Arthur Brown in Physiology, and Dr. David Rosenstein, who was the project director of a public health grant which funded the Russell Street Dental Clinic. This clinic provides free care to the underserved in North Portland. The total funding level for these projects was just over \$600,000 per year which was, on a comparative level for schools of its' size, commendable at the time. The Dean, however, again recognizing the importance of a strong research program if the school was to remain a vital member of the university community, began to stress the recruitment of faculty with research interests and capabilities. Preference was given to those already having funded research grants. He also fostered research groups within the school and encouraged them to develop interdisciplinary projects. By the end of the dean's tenure, grant funding had reached over \$4 million dollars each year and was moving upward. This was a strong tribute to the ability and the willingness of the faculty to adapt to a changing environment and requirement, within the new university setting.

As the school approached the 1990's state funding had not improved. The school of dentistry building was now over 40 years old and needed renovation

and improvement as well as new and more modern equipment on which the students would learn new techniques and skills. Help came from two sources. One was the Dental Alumni Association which over a period of ten years had increased its' level of annual giving from \$75,000 per year to over \$300,000 per year. Much of this was accomplished by many dedicated alumni from all class years conducting an annual phonathon. The phonathon was an unprecedented success within the University gaining dental alumni recognition as "the best on the hill". A second source of added support came from the Oregon Dental Service. The ODS as a non-profit corporation and owned by the dentists in Oregon through the Oregon Dental Association, has provided the school with over \$150,000 each year since 1989 to assist dental school programs. These funds have provided a margin of difference to the school over the years in allowing the school to stay modern and abreast of new technologies.

By 1990 residents of the state began hearing about various initiatives to be placed on the state ballot to reduce property taxes. Having no sales tax it had always been a problem in the state that revenues were dependent only upon property taxes and a state income tax. Proposals for a state sales tax had been defeated many times in the past. State law in Oregon requires a relatively small number of signatures from citizens to place an initiative on the ballot and in 1990 an initiative called "Measure 5" was approved by voters which imposed limits on property tax rates. Property taxes were used exclusively by local governments to fund primary and secondary education. Measure 5 required the state to

replace all money lost by schools for the first five years. The State Legislature had no way to make up for this loss and had to impose severe budget cuts on all agencies of the state government. Being a part of the State System of Higher Education (SSHE), the Oregon Health Sciences University, and the School of Dentistry were assessed an appropriate share of the budget shortfall. For the 1991-1993 biennial budget, the school had to accommodate to a cut of \$1.2 million dollars and in the 1993-1995 biennium the reduction was an additional \$1.8 million dollars. These amounts were staggering by any measure but, for a school already marginally funded, many wondered how the school could possibly survive.

The school's response to the budget reduction process was guided by recommendations of budget priority committees, appointed by Dean VanHassel and broadly representative of the faculty and programs of the school. Prior to work by the committees, however, the Dean presented a very unusual proposal to the University administration. He proposed that instead of identifying only ways to cut the budget, that the school would come up with ways to produce "revenue enhancements". Thus expenses could be removed from the state supported portion of the budget and placed on new budget accounts supported by revenue sources directly generated by the school. This would require the school to become much more self reliant and entrepreneurial but would allow at least a more consistent source of support and one that would be under the control of the school. President Peter Kohler was very supportive of the school's



initiative and encouraged the Dean to proceed with this plan. The second budget committee for the 1993-1995 reductions was chaired by Dr. Arthur Retzlaff and proceeded to investigate over 23 options for reductions and enhancements. A guiding principle imposed by the Dean was that the committee should first consider the major programs in the school and pursue whether certain programs should be cut rather than general reductions which would weaken all programs. After reviewing the possible budget impact of closing the various graduate programs or the dental hygiene program, the committee determined the only closure that would save any significant amount of money was the graduate program in pediatric dentistry. This program was recommended by the committee for closure. Along with an earlier committee's decision to phase out the department of Hospital Dentistry, these were the only two academic programs identified for total elimination due to budget constraints. In all, the committee found several areas for revenue enhancements totaling over \$400,00 per year which were tied to greater expectations for clinic income and also some minor enrollment increases. Another revenue source was to begin charging tuition to students in graduate programs. Up to this time they had been enrolled without cost. The committee determined that there were a large number of full time faculty at or near retirement age. It was proposed that upon their retirement the school would replace them with lesser paid and more part-time faculty. The Dean accepted and endorsed the recommendations of the budget reduction committees and proposed them to the University administration

where they are accepted and implemented. With just one small hitch the school learned to live within the constraints of the new financial situation.

The "hitch" came at the last moment for budget closure in 1995 when the University Library System announced that it could no longer support the dental school library. It proposed that the library be closed and consolidated with the main library further up on the hill. This incensed the dental school faculty and especially Dean VanHassel. His undergraduate degree had been in literature and as Editor of the Journal Of Endodontolgy had a strong affinity to books and the written word. He vowed that he would never let the dental library close and was able to piece together enough resources to permit the library to remain open and directly under the auspices of the dental school.

The aging building continued to require constant attention. With funds made available from the alumni, the ODS fund and individual contributions, renovation projects were completed each summer. During the VanHassel years every dental chair in the school was replaced, all of the lecture halls and seminar rooms were refurbished, the dental hygiene clinic and student lounge were completely remodeled, all departmental offices and research laboratories were rejuvenated and the main reception area was carpeted, decorated, and supplied with new seating. A visiting accreditation committee reported that it was hard to believe that the building was over 40 years old. Except for elevator renovation and the installation of a sprinkler system, all of the renovation was done without any state funds.

By the time the budget situation was finally clarified, the school had gone from 58% state supported to less than 25% state supported. Although the process of recission had been painful and the decisions unpopular to some, the school was able to move into the later years of the 1990's with pride and assurance and with the students feeling little effect of the cuts. Alumni contributions remained strong and the ODS support continued to be sustaining. The Oregon Dental Association had also provided the school with its first endowed chair. In recognition of its' own centennial the Association provided \$1 million to endow the ODA Centennial Endowed Professorship in Restorative Dentistry. Dr. John Sorenson, DDS, MS, PhD, was appointed that honored position.

In 1995 the University, a major health provider in the State of Oregon, found itself at a disadvantage when dealing with health care issues as an institution of higher education within the state system. The many rules and regulations related to expenditure limitations and approvals associated with state agencies made it impossible for the University to act quickly to establish new programs and services in a timely way. President Peter Kohler pursued the concept of separating the University from state agency status to that of a "public corporation" which would have more freedom to carry out its own mission. The Port of Portland and TriMet were other examples of public corporations in the State. Public corporation status was obtained for the University and this had many advantages to the School of Dentistry as well. The main advantage was

that the school was now able benefit directly from new revenue sources generated by its programs and retain tuition money and clinic revenue which were previously only partially passed through to the School's budget. Thus, the dental school has moved into a era of greater self determination. Although state support is welcome it has become a very unstable source of revenue. In many ways the school has benefited by becoming more independent and in control of the revenue streams that will support its programs. The ability to do this was a major credit to leadership of Dean VanHassel.

Although much of the period from 1984 through 1998 was a time of financial uncertainty for the School, the quality of the program remained strong and student academic attainment high. Throughout this period Oregon was nationally recognized for the quality of its students. In most years the grade point average of the entering class was first, second or third highest among all dental schools in the Nation. Likewise, student success on National Board exams ranked in the highest percentiles and the student pass rates on the Western Regional Board exam were consistently over the 95% range. Furthermore, the students reported that their dental school experience was hard but fair and they continue to be the best recruiters for school programs. The satisfied student experience is a tribute to the efforts of Dean VanHassel and a dedicated faculty who have consistently placed highest priority on a humane approach to dental education.