



## UNAM dentistry transcends boundaries

### *Odontología UNAM trascendiendo fronteras*

Fernando Sandoval Vernimmen\*

The National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM, is rated amongst the 200 top world universities. It celebrated 100 years on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010, this makes it one of the first universities to be established in Latin America. Its reputation has transcended to the whole world; this is partly due to the presence of students of different countries who receive training in it, and thus later become its ambassadors; they practice the motto «*Proudly UNAM*» a motto which has traveled beyond our national frontiers.

From the moment of its founding, the School of Dentistry has trained professionals exhibiting international excellence as undergraduate students, and mainly in its many specialties, as well as masters' and doctorate degrees. These graduates have become prominent in the professional circles of their native countries, fostering thus this tradition of professional quality and spirit of service which they have acquired during their training years.

In my personal case, influence exerted by the School of Dentistry has been decisive and has gone beyond my generation. My children selected the UNAM to follow graduate studies. This was due to the comprehensive training, experience, high academic standards, prestige and recognition it offered. In addition to UNAM's strong links with society, the spirit infusing men and women who are a part of it, and the ideals which flow from this study center and are replicated at different latitudes. These characteristics are a reflection of both its academic and non-academic curricula: values are transmitted to students through the daily contact with its teachers.

Life experience at this university offers valuable professional and personal unexpected learning situations. These might include knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, acquired during interaction linking with the community. Implicit knowledge has been the most efficient manner to ensure transcendence of the UNAM culture, it has been

instrumental to instill in its students the need to become motivated to achieve common good above aspirations of personal benefit. Over 96% of all social service activities are directly provided to the general population. UNAM graduates are promoters and actors of social changes.

UNAM instilled in me the concept of responsibility with my country, community work, social assistance and direct linking with underprivileged and low income communities. Following these bases, in 1997 we founded the School of Dentistry attached to the Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ) (University of San Francisco in Quito). An important academic contribution was the training of students in the field of Dentistry and all related specialties. In this endeavor, UNAM objectives, values and principles were always preserved. Experiences and guidelines acquired at the UNAM have been of great support for USFQ. Our curriculum network was designed following its guidelines, and our students attend monthly courses with UNAM's School of Dentistry professors. We presently enjoy an agreement for exchange and mobility, at student and teacher level; we additionally conduct joint research projects. We are sister schools, in the Maxillofacial and Oral specialty, we promote and carry out teaching and social assistance programs in countries such as Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon in the Middle East, as well as in several countries in Central and South America. We preserve a permanent and constant contact which has grown and strengthened with the passing of time.

Following the conviction of commitment to the community, USFQ has provided care in the Ecuadorian coast, ranges and eastern provinces. This care has been extended to over 315,000 low income patients.

\* Dean, School of Dentistry, San Francisco de Quito, University, Quito, Ecuador.

This social program has been extended to other countries in circumstances of greater need than ours. The USFQ School of Dentistry maintains a scholarship program for Middle East graduate students. This places us as an institution which aims to provide not only local but also international contributions.

Finally, taking Louis Pasteur's words: «*science is the soul of the prosperity of nations as well as the source of all progress*», this can be considered an

immortal sentence, but it nevertheless reflects the meaning that the National Autonomous University of Mexico represents for myself and many Latin American graduates.

«*Proudly UNAM*».

Mailing address:

**Fernando Sandoval Vernimmen**

E-mail: drfernandos@hotmail.com