The University of Hong Kong launches a novel international postgraduate program in periodontology conjointly with Peking University in Beijing

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Continuing professional development and lifelong learning have become the trend worldwide in almost every profession. The public and the dental community both wish to ensure the continuing growth of professional competence among dental practitioners. This stems from the view that practitioners need to keep up with the rapid advancements in dental research and technology, and to live up to ever-increasing patient expectations 1. In recent years, the overall demands for postgraduate clinical programs with international standing have been increasing dramatically in mainland China. This was mainly due to the severe shortage of well-trained dental specialists, the rising demands for high-quality dental care, as well as the increasing affluence and dental awareness in Chinese society 2,3. Based on the perceived need for further professional education to manage widely prevalent periodontal diseases in China 2,4, there was a proposal to establish “The University of Hong Kong (HKU)—Peking University (PKU) Conjoint International Postgraduate Program in Periodontology”. The program was initiated following a friendly and cooperative meeting between HKU and PKU senior staff, which took place in Hong Kong in December 2003. On November 23, 2004, the Deans of the HKU Faculty of Dentistry (Prof. Lakshman P. Samaranyake) and the PKU School of Stomatology (Prof. Guang-Yan Yu) met in Beijing and signed an agreement to proceed with the conjoint program (Figure 1). This is a remarkable opportunity for HKU to extend its well-established taught postgraduate program to PKU, and thereby contribute to the professional education of dental specialists in mainland China. In addition this collaboration could augment the oral health and general well-being of mainland Chinese compatriots as well as foreign expatriates.

After receiving official approval by the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China in February 2007, the HKU Faculty of Dentistry is currently launching its new program conjointly with PKU in Beijing. This is to be the first-ever conjoint international postgraduate course in clinical dentistry or medicine to be conducted in mainland China.

The program is based upon HKU’s popular Clinical Master program in Periodontology with over 20 years of proven success. The regulations and syllabus are to be the same as those outlined in the HKU’s current ‘General Regulations for the Degree of Master of
Dental Surgery’ and ‘Syllabus for the Degree of Master of Dental Surgery’ 

. This 24-month full-time course will consist of seven modules, with 50% of time being spent in clinical training and 50% in course work and research. The medium of instruction is to be English. The teachers running the course include well-qualified and committed academic faculty and specialists from HKU and PKU, as well as a group of eminent professors from the USA (Gary C. Armitage, University of California at San Francisco; T. Howard Howell, Harvard University; Thomas Van Dyke, Boston University; Ray C. Williams, University of North Carolina), Europe (Noel Claffey, University of Dublin, Ireland; N.P. Lang, University of Bern, Switzerland), and Australia (P. Mark Bartold, The University of Adelaide).

It is a course of advanced study and research into the histopathogenesis of periodontal diseases, their etiology, prevention, and management, including the role of advanced forms of periodontal therapy in comprehensive oral health care, as well as the planning, routine placement, and supportive care for dental implants. The course comprises lectures, tutorials, interactive seminars, case conferences, as well as clinical and laboratory work together with project assignments. Training in research methodology and the conduct of an appropriately planned research project, including a dissertation or written report, constitute an integral component of the program. On successful completion and passing the required examinations, the candidates will receive a Master of Dental Surgery degree in Periodontology (MDS Perio) from HKU and a certificate from PKU, which will be in compliance with the currently in force General Regulations. Thereafter, the qualified graduates may elect to practice periodontology in a specialist clinic, or work in hospital settings or academic institutions.

Enrolment is open to candidates from mainland China and overseas . Applicants are required to hold a bachelor’s degree in dentistry or qualification of equivalent standing from a recognized university or comparable institution, and have at least 1 year of experience in dental practice. They must also present a verified good professional standing certificate and a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score of not less than 550 (paper-based test) or 213 (computer-based test), or a minimum overall band of 6 with no subtest lower than 5.5 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). If required, applicants may have to satisfy the program directors in a qualifying examination. The course is scheduled to commence in February 2008, and the fee (currently RMB140 000 per year) is comparable to that of the program conducted in HKU. The home of the program is ‘The University of Hong Kong-Peking University Advanced Training Center in Periodontology’, situated close to the 2008 Olympic Games National Stadium, convenient for the metro and other transportation. The Center occupies a whole floor of 14 000 square feet, and has fully equipped dental units, with in-house radiographic facilities, dental laboratories, seminar rooms (with videoconferencing), as well as study and work areas for both students and teachers. Other facilities available to the students include HKU on-line access (e.g. HKU libraries), as well as PKU libraries, computer and information technology facilities, health services, and sports facilities. The Unveiling Ceremony of the Center was held on October 9, 2007 in Beijing and the officiants included the Vice Chancellor of HKU Prof. Lap-Chee Tsui and the Vice President Prof. Jian-Hua Lin (on behalf of PKU President Prof. Zhi-Hong Xu). Deans of the HKU Faculty of Dentistry (Prof. Lakshman P. Samaranayake) and PKU School of Stomatology (Prof. Guang-Yan Yu), as well as the Honorary President (Prof. Zhen-Kang Zhang) and the President of Chinese Stomatological Association (Prof. Xing Wang) also officiated. Senior teachers in periodontology from PKU and HKU, including Prof. Cai-Fang Cao, Prof. Lijian Jin, Prof. E.F. Corbet, and Dr. Gordon Chiu also attended the ceremony (Figure 2). Two media interviews were conducted on October 7 and 9, 2007 in Hong Kong and Beijing, respectively.

It is believed that this conjoint program will further raise the high profile of the HKU Faculty of Dentistry internationally, and greatly enhance the academic and professional standing of the specialty of periodontology in mainland China. It will become
a pioneering collaboration in terms of enhancing academic merit, course contents, profiles of academic staff and their disbursement, student recruitment, clinic administration, and overall professional management. Based on the strength of both HKU and PKU, this initiative could well lead to more collaborative ventures and similar conjoint programs in other dental disciplines and health care specialties. The program is expected to attract experienced general dental practitioners, as well as those who are newly qualified, and no doubt all the participants will be committed to pursuing high standards in their future professional careers.

References