

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSORS EMERITI



The Capital of Knowledge

**Proceedings
of the First International Congress**

May 30 - June 1, 2019, Athens, Greece

Edited by

Dennis V. Cokkinos,
Niki Agnantis, Katerina Gardikas, Constantin R. Soldatos

SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION
OF USEFUL BOOKS



ATHENS 2020

MUSEUM OF THE SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY, NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS

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Abstract

Established in 2012, the Museum of Dentistry at the Dental School of the University of Athens houses a large collection of instruments, devices, materials and dental units, reflecting not only the history of the Athens School of Dentistry and dentistry in Greece, but also worldwide. The historical archive of Athens Dental School is incorporated and research on it is supported. The archival footage tracks the evolution of the “Οδοντοϊατρικόν Σχολεῖον” (Dental School) from the very early steps in 1916 until the 1980s. A Digital Museum (www.museum.dent.uoa.gr) has been created not only to present the exhibits but also to feature the history of Dental Education and Practice in Greece. The website visitor may study the entire dental legislation since the establishment of the Modern Greek State until our days. The teaching staff is presented also, as a homage to all those who contributed to the upgrading of dental education. The Museum of Dentistry not only supports a remarkable number of research projects, but also educational programs for schoolchildren, either primary or secondary, that have already gained distinction.

Keywords: Museum of Dentistry; Athens dental school; history of dentistry; digital museum.

Introduction

The establishment of a Museum of Dentistry at the Dental School of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens has been a constant request for many years. The first step was taken in 2012, when the President of the Dental School of Athens (Professor Georgios Vougiouklakis) organized a research team. The aim was to

create an organization that would manage the reception, recording, maintenance, storage, documentation, research, interpretation but most important of all, the exhibition and the promotion of Dentistry and the dental Profession from antiquity until nowadays to the public.

Museum collections and exhibits

The main exhibition area of the Museum is located on the first floor of the new building of the Dental School in Goudi. (Fig.1) The two halls house a remarkable collection, which includes a significant number of exhibits. The Museum's objects are displayed both in the main area of the Museum and in special display cases in order to meet the demands of modern museological exhibition and Museum function spaces.



Figure 1. Collections at the main area of the Museum.
(Photo by M. Sakelliou)



Figure 2. Dental tools and devices.
(Photo by M. Sakelliou)

The collection, on the first floor exhibition area in the new building, consists of scientific dental instruments dating back to the beginning of the previous century. Examples are surgical instruments such as dental forceps and levers. There are also operative dentistry devices like amalgam dispensers, dental drills and various types of dental headpieces. The first air driven contra-angle hand piece unit that was used at the operative dentistry Department is exhibited there. Moreover, tools and devices of prosthetic dentistry are displayed as porcelain teeth, impression trays, a vulcanizing device for the manufacturing of dentures and others (Fig.2). A rare dental unit with an even most rare dental office light is part of the museum collection of dental units.

One of the most striking exhibits is the portable wooden cabinet with materials and tools for exercising the dental art, which inter alia contains a significant number of glass vials with pharmaceutical preparations for dental use, a great collection of hand tools for placing materials, endodontics tools, needles, syringes, intact local anesthetic vials, etc.

We are deeply convinced that a very important part of the history of dentistry is the story of the people who tried to explore, understand and apply the principles of dentistry. A dialectic relationship between yesterday and today can be achieved by Museum exhibition islets where the exhibits are in plain sight for both students and patients on a daily basis. For this purpose, old dental units, dental appliances and tools were selected and are displayed in properly designed areas of the dental school building complex. (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Old dental unit. (Photo by M. Sakelliou)

The dental school's historical archive

The Dental Department Museum incorporates the historical archive of Athens Dental School (Fig. 3) and supports the research of the archive. The rare archival footage tracks the evolution of the "Οδοντολογικόν Σχολείον" (Dental School) from the very early steps of establishment in 1916 until the early 1980s.

The documents illustrate the way in which the first University Dental educational institution was formed, as well as the changes over the years. In that way, the critical historical period, during which the earlier west dentistry constituted in Greece, is revealed. At the same time, unknown aspects of Athens University academic activity are illuminated.

The digital museum

The Dental Department Museum utilizing the advantages of modern Internet and multimedia technology developed a Digital Museum (www.museum.dent.uoa.gr). The purpose was not only to present the exhibits but also to feature the history of dental education and practice in Greece through time.

In the digital crossroads of contemporary technology and dental history personal exploration is allowed based on digital storytelling. Thus, the website visitor can wander around and study the entire dental legislation since the establishment of the Modern Greek State until our days.

One of the most ambitious programs that are running at the moment is the creation of open, freely accessible online library for the specialist, the student, the scholar, everyone. Rich material about the Museum and Dentistry will be offered in electronic form. Already, the Museum has undertaken the digitization of all English dental books, which are copyright free.

The website also presents the teaching staff, wishing to pay homage to all those who contributed to the upgrading of dental education in our area. The presentation is not through a cold, sterile and long list of names, but through the evolution of the overall staff per academic year, as it is recorded in the university yearbooks. Thus, the reader can follow the course of subjects and faculty over time. In addition, a special section is devoted to all doctorates of Dental School of Athens. Currently, an effort is in progress, so that all the graduates will be recorded, from the first one who graduated in 1916 to the present day.

Conclusions

Research education and awards. The Museum of Dentistry, like any university museum, supports a remarkable number of research projects. A monograph on "Dentistry in the Ancient Greek World" is the result of one of these programs. Another study, which concerns the role of "Iatro-synedrion" (medical council) in the support of the dental profession and the promotion of dental education in Greece, is already at the stage of final writing.

At the same time, the Museum contributes to the teaching of the undergraduate course on the history of dentistry through its rich collection. Innovative educational programmes have been designed for schoolchildren, both for primary and secondary education. The programmes designed and realized by the Museum of Dentistry, have begun to bear fruit and also to be well-appraised. The staff of the Museum won the first prize for the best Poster presentation at 40th National Medical Conference held in Athens (14-17 May 2014) by presenting of an educational program designed and implemented for elementary students.