ATSU’s Missouri dental school receives initial accreditation; Classes begin in October

The following article has been provided by ATSU’s Missouri School of Dentistry & Oral Health.

At its August 2013 meeting, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) adopted a resolution to grant initial accreditation to A.T. Still University’s Missouri School of Dentistry & Oral Health (ATSU-MOSDOH), located in Kirksville, Mo. Initial accreditation was the final step needed before ATSU could welcome its inaugural class and begin classes on October 1. Selected from 954 applicants, the student body will comprise 22 women and 20 men from 19 states, including nine students from Missouri. Additional states represented include Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin. The mission of ATSU-MOSDOH is to increase access to oral healthcare for Missouri’s most vulnerable populations. The number of dentists in the state is declining, while the underserved population and demand for dentists are rising.

Central to the new school’s curriculum is extensive, in-depth clinical training inside community health centers (CHCs), as called for in a 2011 Institute of Medicine report. In Missouri, CHCs care for 420,000 vulnerable residents, or 25 percent of the total number of low-income and uninsured citizens. Collaboration with CHCs for on-site clinical education is the most effective way to break down the barriers to care faced by Missouri’s underserved populations.

Unlike any other dental school in the Midwest, graduates of ATSU-MOSDOH will earn a certificate of public health, in addition to a doctor of dental medicine degree, which will prepare a workforce uniquely qualified to care for diverse, underserved populations. Partnerships with CHCs are expected to increase retention within the state’s oral workforce by encouraging graduates to practice public health dentistry.

“We are very pleased with CODA’s decision to grant initial accreditation,” said ATSU President Craig Phelps, DO. “It means ATSU may begin educating a new generation of oral healthcare providers to meet the needs of our state and nation. Our ‘hometown’ partnership program with CHCs will allow young women and men from underserved communities the opportunity to receive a degree and return home. Each dentist returning to his or her community will not only provide needed oral healthcare and public health expertise, but will also provide a valuable, positive economic impact.”

Said Christopher Halliday, DDS, MPH, dean of the new dental school, “We are grateful to CODA for enabling us to move forward with our mission to educate community-minded oral healthcare professionals through groundbreaking, innovative model of dental education.” Dr. Halliday has spent his career caring for the underserved in Alaska, New Mexico and Arizona, and advocating on their behalf, most recently as assistant surgeon general of the U.S.

The relationship with GHHC is just one of the critical partnerships enabling ATSU to realize its vision of an innovative model of dental education. In fact, it was collaboration with the Missouri Primary Care Association (MPCA) that facilitated ATSU developing relationships with GHHC and the other CHCs.

The Missouri Foundation for Health also provided support to ATSU’s new dental school by awarding $7 million in grants toward its development. Beginning with its inaugural class, ATSU-MOSDOH will help transform dental education by graduating community-minded dentists who will help address the shortage of oral healthcare providers and improve access to oral healthcare among underserved areas and populations.

The Missouri School of Dentistry & Oral Health Faculty, from left: Chris Halliday, DDS, MPH, dean; Dale Defett, DMD, MS, director, integrated human sciences; Lia Cox, MD, DO, associate dean for education and assessment; Parker Crutchfield, PhD, research director, and Allison Crutchfield, DMD, director, pre-clinical education and simulation clinic. DENTAL SIMULATORS mark the inaugural class of MOSDOH student doctors. Installation of all simulators and associated workstations is now complete on the Kirksville campus. THE INTERPROFESSIONAL EDUCATION BUILDING will house classrooms, lab space, faculty offices for MOSDOH and also a human patient simulation center for medical students attending ATSU’s Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine. On October 24, ATSU-MOSDOH will host an Inaugural Ceremony at 2 p.m. at this location. Members interested in attending can contact Virginia Halterman at 660-626-2544.


Founded in 1892 as the nation’s first college of osteopathic medicine, ATSU provides graduate-level education in whole-person health care through its two regional schools, the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine (KCOM), and the Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine (ARCOM). ATSU’s Kirksville School of Osteopathic Medicine, the School of Health Management, the Arizona School of Dentistry & Oral Health, the Arizona School of Health Sciences, the School of Osteopathic Medicine of Arizona, and the Missouri School of Dentistry & Oral Health, A.T. Still University, Missouri School of Dentistry & Oral Health (ATSU-MOSDOH) was founded to address the disparity in oral healthcare in Missouri and across the nation. ATSU-MOSDOH will graduate a new generation of community-minded dentists who have an in-depth understanding of and a commitment to serving at-risk populations. For information visit www.atsu.edu/mission.