

Does life begin at 40? Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the UWC Faculty of Dentistry, 2018.

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Congratulations on reaching your 40th anniversary! The South African Dental Association (SADA) joins you as you celebrate such an important milestone. Not only are we celebrating the courage of all the people who were the pioneers of the Institution that is responsible for graduating 47% of South Africa's new dentists, but we are also celebrating 40 years of incredible accomplishments. One such evidence of your accomplishment is having The Faculty of Dentistry being rated as a leader on the African Continent and also recognized as a WHO Collaborating Centre. The majority of our members and potential members in the last few years have come from your School. We are absolutely excited at this momentous occasion and proud to be associated with your Institution.

So, what is in the number 40? Does Life begin at 40 for your Faculty? The answer is yes, we think the past 40 years, as much as you have been adding great value to the profession, it was also "practice time" for the next 40 years. This milestone is worth the celebrations:

In mathematics, forty is a composite number, an octagonal number, and as the sum of the first four pentagonal numbers, it is a pentagonal pyramidal number – Your Faculty is made of different and diverse elements which make you a balanced and stronger Faculty not only to South Africans but the rest of Africa. This is a true testament to the power of your School's education as it has launched hundreds of interesting lives and amazingly fruitful careers.

In science, the number 40 is the atomic number of zirconium (Zr) – The School has over the years produced "gold-coloured" oral health practitioners that contribute towards quality oral health care to our rainbow nation. Over the years, I have met many of your graduates, they have fond memories of the one place they once called Home; they recall the School as being a magical place which contributed immensely to their life and career trajectory. We celebrate and are proud of the multitude of alumni spread locally and internationally, with some having gone on to occupy important positions in universities as well as in the private and public sectors.

In the spiritual space, forty is often used for time periods, forty days or forty years, which separate "two distinct epochs". Your graduate community has been very active, not only about the issues that people faced 40, 30, 20 years ago, but also on new issues for this generation. Therefore, as we celebrate 40 years, we are marking the end of one epoch and the beginning of another. Life does begin at 40 after all!

40 years may have gone past, but the work still continues. This milestone presents us with an opportunity to celebrate, but also to reflect. As we look back, the School must look 40 years ahead. It must ensure that the next generation is able to deal with oral health challenges of today and provide solutions for the new challenges of the future.

In Tsonga, we have a saying "Ku tlula ka mahala ku letela n'wana wa le ndzeni". Literally translated, this means "The way an impala jumps influences and teaches its unborn child". The way the School chooses to face the challenges of the next 40 years will influence how relevant the Faculty remains and also determine the quality of oral health practitioners it produces. As an Association, we can only hope that your "jumping" is chosen wisely to ensure the School remains at the forefront of Oral Health Care development in the future.

As we celebrate with you, we hope that your leadership be considering and providing solutions to questions such as:
How do we train students for a new epoch, position the School to add input and respond to the needs of the National Health Insurance?

How do we make dentistry education and service provision more accessible and affordable to those in the remote areas and who cannot afford it?

What are the key future challenges and how do we prepare our students and alumni to deal with them?

The students, oral health practitioners- in-the-making, armed with knowledge from the Faculty, should be able to answer amongst others, the following questions:

Who am I?

Where do I come from?

Where am I going?

Why am I here?

What difference can I make?

The Association wishes you a Happy Anniversary for the passing era and wishes you well for the next 40 years.

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