

„Today, you need much more in terms of skills, networking, and information communication. And FDI provides that better than anyone else...”

INTERVIEW with Dr. Orlando Monteiro da Silva,
FDI President-elect of the World Dental Federation



During the upcoming FDI Congress in Mexico City from the 14th until the 17th of September, Dr. Orlando Monteiro da Silva from Portugal will take over the duty as the world dental president from Dr. Roberto Vianna. Our editorial board member Dr. Irina Dragan had the pleasure to interview him for AIM.

What will be your main goals during your term of office as FDI President?

I'd like to see a better, leaner, younger and more flexible FDI.

What aspects of world dentistry can be influenced and improved by FDI?

At present, FDI, World Dental Federation is advocating for Oral Health to be integrated somehow in the WHO strategy for non-communicable diseases (NCDs). If we could achieve that, oral health and dentists worldwide would be more integrated into the medical sphere. This would benefit patients and contribute to a deeper, transversal approach to health, in which dental medicine should have a role of greater responsibility all over the world. In terms of health economics, oral diseases are the second to fourth most expensive area of national health budgets. The poor and disadvantaged suffer most from oral diseases, so prevention strategies should address both risk factors and the social determinants of health. Dentists are a key component in community-based health care and are in a unique position to diagnose and assess patients with regard to risk factors, in particular utilizing the emerging technologies of salivary diagnostics and prognostics.

FDI is also making a contribution to specific areas of policy, notably providing advice to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) on the issue of amalgam. We want to ensure that the proposed future treaty on mercury contains provisions for dental amalgam: this restorative material has been in use for over a century and has proved to be very effective. FDI is also a unique source of continuing education, for the dentists of tomorrow. It operates the World Dental Fund, which is supported by generous individuals, member National Dental Associations and corporate partners, to finance innovative health promotion projects in low- and middle-income countries, most recently in Africa.

What problems does FDI face in carrying out its work?

FDI World Dental Federation represents 198 national dental associations and specialist groups. It faces the same problems of organization and communication as other similar structures. Working as a team can sometimes be a challenge but things come together to achieve our objectives of being the authentic voice of dentistry in the world, furthering the cause of optimal oral health and advancing the ethics, art, science and practice of dentistry.

What activities are the most important and how do they affect young dentists?

We have activities for all of them, whether their interest is scientific, social, networking, volunteering and so on. They affect young dentists the same way that they affect all our colleagues around the world, with one important difference: nowadays, to be successful in the profession, it's not enough just to open a practice and wait for patients to come along. If you do that, you'd better take a seat because, in most cases, you'll have a very long wait. Today, you need much more in terms of skills, networking, and information communication. And FDI provides that better than anyone else.

Why is it important to become involved in FDI?

For the reasons I pointed out in my last answer. But also because FDI is unique, what you might call 'a classic', always fashionable, always good to wear and in all conditions. It's a prestige brand that all colleagues can wear everywhere in the world.

When did you start to get involved in FDI?

In 2000. My first congress was the millennium one, in Paris. After that, I became addicted! Before 2001, before the Kuala Lumpur Congress, I had already made up my mind: I wanted to be President of FDI.

How did FDI affect your career and your ideas about dentistry and politics?

In a powerful way. I was President of the Portuguese Dental Association at the same time. FDI helped me a lot to understand the profession in a global perspective. I couldn't achieve that without the network of FDI. Ever! I'm member of several professional, scientific and social dental medicine international organizations. But FDI is the top. Nº 1!

Will your FDI Presidency have effects on Portuguese Dentistry and what might those effects be?

I'm sure it will. In a positive way. It will increase the international visibility of Portuguese dental medicine and that of the *médicosdentistas*, oral physicians, as dentists are called in Portugal. We have very skilled professionals, recognized all over the world, but that's a secret that many people don't know. I want to help Portuguese dental medicine to think a little bit more outside the box: to open new perspectives, new challenges in this world where there are no limits. Another goal would be to draw attention to the African Portuguese speaking countries, like Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe. They have huge needs in terms of oral health and dentists. We need some action here from the international decision makers and from the profession.



Fig. 1: The representatives of YDW were one of the first ones to congratulate Dr. Orlando Monteiro da Silva for winning the elections in 2009 in Singapore.

Where do you see FDI in 10 years?

I see a FDI made up of people, for all peoples all around the world. Leading the world to oral health. A modern NGO, from top to bottom. A reference for the profession, more known and better known.

How important is cooperation between FDI and YDW?

Crucial. Young Dentists mean renovation. The future. Investing in them is a task for the present. I intend to promote a summit with young leaders in our congress in Hong Kong. We'll celebrate our 100th congress there. There is a challenge to be addressed: what do we want for the next 100 years? Can we imagine that?

How can YDW improve their work?

By improving its social capital. That means organization, ethics, behavior, networking, self responsibility. Human resources and social capital. That's the key issue. The rest comes naturally.

What are your future expectations of the cooperation between FDI and YDW?

As I mentioned, the highest. We need more representation from young generations in all areas. I'm 48. In my first congress I had the impression that colleagues were a little bit antique. Now that impression is not so strong. Do you know why? Because of that collective generation hallucination of getting older at the same time. We need to get the impression that colleagues are younger. Meaning having more 'youngness' within us.

What would you recommend young dentists interested in international dental affairs?

Learn English and, if possible, other languages and join FDI!

Learn more about the FDI Congress in Mexico: <http://www.fdicongress.org/>
Read more about Dr. Orlando Monteiro da Silva in his blog: <http://orlandoms.com>