

A New Career Path and Teaching Environment

Gaston King

The reasons I applied for the ITI Scholarship in San Antonio, USA were twofold: firstly, it is a center for bone-regenerative research using bone morphogenetic protein (BMP) and secondly, I wanted to go to a leading US institution to further my experience in implant dentistry.



Dr. Gaston King qualified in 1982 (NZ), with a specialist degree in 1992 (Australia) and was a Senior Clinical Lecturer (UK) until 2001. He has won prestigious research awards and now runs a

highly successful specialist referral practice: the Bath and Bristol Periodontal Clinic in SW England.

I had just completed my PhD in BMPs in 1999 and was a senior lecturer in the Department of Periodontology at St Bartholomew's and the Royal London School of Medicine and Dentistry. A sabbatical in the United States would enable me to establish collaborative research links as well as develop implant dentistry further in our own postgraduate program. Having been awarded the Scholarship, my family moved to Texas in October 2000 and the experience was more enriching than we could ever have imagined.

I was involved in a number of research projects that led to several publications and were also in line with the post-doctoral Master's program. The projects included work with BMPs, bone crest changes around implants, bone regeneration using enamel matrix proteins and sinus grafting procedures. The research included retrospective analyses, involvement in several current laboratory and clinical studies and writing grants for future projects. Attending doctoral seminars with the prosthetic department allowed me to see the close relationship with the department of periodontics in providing implant treatment and was something I wanted to see more of at St Bart's.

Friendships formed very quickly and we also forged meaningful Christian friendships at a large, dynamic Episcopalian Church in the city, which proved to be a turning point in our lives. My time in San Antonio also provided me with exposure to leading players in periodontics and implant dentistry and it was an honor to be invited to participate in the 4th European Federation of Periodontology Workshop in 2002, to set international standards for clinical

practice. The same year I was invited to become a Fellow of the ITI.

After my return, much soul searching in regard to various conflicts of interest finally led me to the decision to no longer pursue an academic career within the university system. I have since bought my own premises, converting a residential bungalow in the South West of England, and have developed a 100% specialist periodontal referral practice, rarely seen outside London. Because of my academic background, the priority was to focus on education programs providing clinically relevant updates in the area of periodontics and implants for general dental practitioners. The clinical research done in San Antonio in periodontal regeneration is implemented in our treatment of patients. Our clinic, Bath and Bristol Periodontal Clinic, was awarded runner-up Best Specialist Referral Practice at the prestigious UK Private Dentistry Awards in November 2007 - "its focus on quality care and professional support in their particular field of expertise [...] with] an exceptional web-site [...] impressed the judging panel".

The scholarship was pivotal in my decision to move from teaching students within an academic environment to being actively involved with local practitioners and providing a specialist service to referred patients, while continuing to teach for the ITI education program. The major shift in my career is that I am no longer participating in active research. The progress from an academic post to a fully private specialist practice has brought its own challenges including developing new relationships with referring colleagues, practice staff and business. I am very much indebted to the ITI for the opportunity that the ITI Scholarship provided both professionally and personally, and I would wholeheartedly recommend the scholarship to anyone with an open mind who is interested in teaching and furthering their professional career, whether clinical or research based.