

School of Dental Medicine Dean Search Committee Open Forum #1

Monday, January 23, 2023, 3:30 pm – Via Zoom

Minutes:

1. Welcome and Introductions – Dr. Tony Delitto, Chair of the School of Dental Medicine (SDM) Dean Search Committee, welcomed participants and thanked everyone for joining. He explained that the open forum's purpose is for the committee to receive input from SDM stakeholders about characteristics of the next dean and to overview and answer questions about the search process.¹ Committee members were introduced (see separate committee roster), as were representatives of Russell Reynolds Associates (RRA), the firm retained to support the search.
2. Search Process – Dr. Delitto overviewed search phases. Dr. Shekhar charged the committee on December 20, 2022, when members also received required Pitt orientation about legal and equity concerns. The firm will widely distribute the position profile when finalized and directly contact possible candidates. All in SDM are encouraged, though not required, to send candidate suggestions to committee staff support Joanna Spontak (j.spontak@pitt.edu). Dr. Delitto explained that the committee will convene to review applications and identify who will be invited to a virtual group interview with the committee. The committee will formulate standardized questions and an evaluation rubric that will be used for all candidates. Following virtual interviews, the committee will review data and determine who proceeds to the finalist round of campus visits. Dr. Delitto emphasized that the search committee does not select the incoming dean, but rather provides to Dr. Shekhar an unranked list of three-to-five finalists (though may identify more or fewer, as these numbers are not proscriptive), each of whom the committee determines could perform successfully as dean. In addition to providing the unranked list of finalists, the committee will meet with Dr. Shekhar to present an oral report, when members can provide additional feedback. At that point, the committee's work ceases while Dr. Shekhar hosts campus visits for the finalists and proceeds toward negotiation and offer. When an offer letter is signed, the incoming dean and start date will be publicly announced.
3. Transparency and Confidentiality – Dr. Delitto described the committee's aim to conduct the search as transparently as possible and plans to regularly update the SDM community about search status. He noted the committee's website, where updates will be provided. Dr. Delitto emphasized the need for strict search confidentiality in perpetuity. He noted that the position profile and committee members are public information, but that later phases of the search necessitate strict confidentiality to protect applicants' employment. Ms. Kathy Vuturo of RRA followed up to request that the SDM community refrain from directly following up with candidates or making inquiries with others about potential candidates.
4. RRA Process, Timeline – Ms. Vuturo described the firm's processes and anticipated search timeline. She explained that RRA visited campus in December for the search kick-off and for stakeholder interviews to learn more about SDM to finalize search strategy and inform the position profile. To build a candidate pool, Ms. Vuturo summarized that RRA will explore professional association members, top NIH-funded dental medicine schools and researchers, Canadian dental medicine schools, and all accredited US schools of dental medicine, among other venues. Ms. Vuturo described RRA's plans for six weeks in the market conducting candidate outreach, with the committee to reconvene in mid-March for applicant review. At that time, members will finalize questions and the evaluation rubric as well as select which applicants to virtually as a committee. Following virtual interviews, the committee will identify candidates for finalist campus visits, which are expected in April-May. The search is expected to conclude in May, though the incoming dean's installation date may be in summer or fall 2023. Ms. Vuturo asked participants to forward candidate recommendations and source institutions.

¹ A second open forum is scheduled for Thursday, February 23, 2023, beginning at 12 pm ET via Zoom.

5. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – Ms. Vuturo noted that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are vital foci throughout the search. She described that RRA considers potential candidates from nontraditional backgrounds rather than performing triage based on academic pedigree. Dr. Delitto added that DEI was a primary topic during committee orientation and that members plan to ask questions about DEI activities and commitment, including requesting specific examples of DEI efforts.
6. Open Discussion/Q&A – Dr. Delitto opened the meeting for discussion and questions.
 - Dr. Delitto described an early submission inquiring as to if Pitt will support the incoming dean by investing in a long overdue new clinical facility. He replied that this was asked by the committee while meeting with Dr. Shekhar to receive the search charge. Dr. Shekhar is aware of the need for a clinical facility update, which will be pursued with the new dean.
 - An attendee asked if the committee would reveal required and desired attributes of the incoming dean. Dr. Delitto summarized that the incoming dean must be a respected researcher with clinical and administrative experience who is a superb teacher/mentor, generously serves the home institution and broader scientific community, and has high emotional intelligence and a demonstrable DEI commitment. He added that teamwork and collaboration skills will be vital for the incoming dean. Dr. Delitto explained that the incoming dean’s research and clinical foci are not qualifying or limiting factors. Desired attributes include an internationally recognized research program, experience with clinical expansion, and outstanding philanthropic/fundraising prowess, among others.
 - An attendee inquired about the prior dental dean search, mentioning that the process may have damaged external relationships and asking how the committee will address such challenges. Dr. Delitto replied that the committee is aware of possible internal and external misgivings. Dr. Shekhar and all committee members are committed to search integrity. Dr. Delitto noted a vital difference between the prior and current search being the partnership with and support of RRA. He explained that the committee recognizes that the incoming dean’s path to success is partly based on the search’s legitimacy and integrity. Committee member Dr. Andy Herlich added that Dr. Shekhar specified that the result of this search is not a foregone conclusion and that Dr. Shekhar expressed trust in the committee, the firm, and the process.
 - An attendee questioned committee representation of junior faculty, noting that junior members serving on the committee also have significant administrative responsibilities rather than focusing primarily on research, for example. Dr. Delitto clarified that some members were elected by their peers, according to Pitt search guidelines. He reassured participants that success in research and support for junior faculty career development will be important parts of candidate assessment. Committee member Dr. Giuseppe Intini identified himself as a clinician-scientist and specified that he is committed to ensuring that the incoming dean possesses research appreciation and experience. Committee member Dr. Anitha Potluri revealed that the draft position specification explicitly emphasizes research experience. Dr. Delitto echoed that all committee members recognize that research is vital to SDM.
 - An attendee asked about applicants to date and if the number of candidates is comparable to other dean searches at this early stage. Ms. Vuturo clarified that the position profile has not been finalized and distributed, so applications are pending.
 - An attendee asked about the timeline and contingency plans if the May deadline is not met. Ms. Vuturo replied that the search is on schedule, and based on her and RRA’s experience, the search timeline is feasible. She explained that candidate availability can cause delays, but that significant timeline changes are not anticipated. The group learned that the previous dean search supported by RRA, Dean of the School of Nursing, closely adhered to RRA’s proposed timeline.
 - An attendee inquired about competing current dental dean searches. Ms. Vuturo explained that several are active, but that she does not anticipate the competing searches to cause barriers for Pitt’s search.
 - Committee member Dr. David Susko expressed that general dentistry experience and appreciation are desirable for the incoming dean.
 - An attendee asked how stakeholders were identified for the firm’s December visit. Staff support replied that Dr. Shekhar suggested most of the stakeholders. Ms. Vuturo clarified that the firm’s goal was to acquire a broad range of SDM information via stakeholders with diverse responsibilities and professional duties.

- An attendee confirmed the significance of research, then asked if that aspect will outweigh other attributes of the incoming dean. Dr. Delitto clarified that no single attribute or trait will outweigh others. He added that, during the committee charge, Dr. Shekhar emphasized the importance of the practice plan and its expansion for SDM and its future.
 - An attendee asked about the source institutions RRA is pursuing and if large dental practice plans will be included. Ms. Vuturo replied that candidates based in large practices are less likely to hold qualifications commensurate with appointment as tenured full Professor in SDM, particularly in the research domain, but that RRA is open to suggestions.
7. Closing – On behalf of the committee, Dr. Delitto thanked participants for their input. He encouraged stakeholders to recommend candidates and to communicate with the committee via the search committee’s website <https://www.dental.pitt.edu/about/school-dental-medicine-dean-search> or by contacting Joanna Spontak. Dr. Delitto reiterated that he will provide status updates when possible, while conducting the search with strict confidentiality.

Action Items:

(Optional) Email candidates or candidate referrers to Joanna Spontak (j.spontak@pitt.edu) or to RRA’s dedicated search email (Pitt.DentalMedicineDean@russellreynolds.com).

(Optional) Submit questions/comments via the search committee’s website:
<https://www.dental.pitt.edu/about/school-dental-medicine-dean-search>

(Optional) Email questions and comments to Joanna Spontak (j.spontak@pitt.edu). To remain anonymous while communicating with the committee, simply note the request to be anonymous in your email.

Transcribed by J. Spontak, 2/9/23.