

School of Dental Medicine Dean Search Committee Open Forum #2

Thursday, February 23, 2023, 12 pm – Via Zoom

Minutes:

1. Welcome and Introductions – Dr. Tony Delitto, Chair of the School of Dental Medicine (SDM) Dean Search Committee, greeted attendees and thanked all for joining. He summarized the open forum’s purpose 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. Committee members were introduced (see separate committee roster), as were representatives of Russell Reynolds Associates (RRA), the firm retained to support the search.
2. Committee Elections and Selection – Dr. Delitto asked committee member and SDM Faculty Affairs Administrator Ms. Sarah French to summarize the committee member election process. She explained the Pitt requirement about committee member elections for dean search committees – four faculty members must be elected by their academic peers, i.e., assistant professors voting for an assistant professor representative. The fourth elected member received the most votes overall after the faculty member winner in rank. Ms. French also noted a staff representative election, and she showed election emails and reminders that were distributed in SDM. Student representatives, one undergraduate and one graduate, were appointed. She described that Senior Vice Chancellor for the Health Sciences Dr. Anantha Shekhar invited the remaining members to complete the committee.
3. Search Process – Dr. Delitto overviewed search phases. Dr. Shekhar charged the committee on December 20, 2022, when members underwent required Pitt orientation about legal and equity concerns. The finalized position profile has been widely distributed, and the firm is contacting potential applicants and candidate referrers. Dr. Delitto explained that the committee will convene to review applications in mid-March to identify who will be scheduled for virtual group interviews with the committee. The committee will formulate standardized questions and an evaluation rubric used for all candidates. Following virtual interviews, members 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 submitting the unranked list of finalists, the committee will meet with Dr. Shekhar so members can provide specific feedback. At that point, the committee’s work ceases while Dr. Shekhar hosts finalist campus visits, anticipated for April-May, ahead of negotiation and offer. When an offer letter is signed, the incoming dean and start date will be publicly announced.
4. Transparency and Confidentiality – Dr. Delitto described the committee’s aim to conduct the search as transparently as possible, noting plans to share status updates with the SDM community. He 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 confidentiality to protect applicants’ employment. Ms. Kathy Vuturo of RRA followed up to request that the SDM community refrain from directly contacting candidates or making inquiries with others about potential applicants.
5. RRA Process, Timeline – Ms. Vuturo described the firm’s processes and anticipated 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. Ms. Vuturo described RRA’s plans for six weeks in the market conducting candidate outreach, and she described strong interest in the dean opportunity and high regard for Pitt SDM. She explained that RRA performs reference and background checks for finalists, including social media reviews. The search is expected to conclude in May, though the incoming dean’s installation date may be summer or fall 2023.

6. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – Ms. Vuturo noted that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are vital foci throughout the search, from pursuing candidates with diverse backgrounds and those who are demonstrably committed to DEI through equitable search practices such as standardizing interview questions. 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.
7. Open Discussion/Q&A – Dr. Delitto opened the meeting for discussion and questions.
 - An attendee asked why reference checks are performed for finalists rather than for all who are interviewed. Ms. Vuturo described the need for a balance between providing as much background info as possible to the searching entity while maintaining applicant confidentiality. She noted that pursuing references for all who are virtually interviewed would consume time and resources as well as disclose candidacy to an applicant’s home institution and potentially jeopardize current employment. Ms. Vuturo explained that, in the firm’s experience, early referencing has led to candidates withdrawing from searches, so they reserve referencing only for finalists.
 - An attendee inquired about committee composition, noting that Dr. Intini is the only member who is NIH-funded faculty in SDM and explaining the significant contribution of research to the School’s success. Dr. Delitto replied that some committee members outside of SDM are NIH-funded investigators, and he reassured attendees that research experience and support are vital for the next dean. He explained that all committee members recognize the significance of research in SDM’s mission.
 - An attendee asked about the undergraduate student representative on the committee, and members clarified that the undergraduate rep is a second-year trainee, Class of 2025.
 - An attendee asked about possible challenges for the next dean in terms of Pitt’s responsibility center management (RCM) business model and shared governance. Dr. Delitto replied that when Dr. Shekhar chaired the committee, he was very clear that stabilizing and growing the dental practice plan will be a vital project for the next dean. Dr. Delitto explained that the committee aims to probe financial oversight experience as well as emotional intelligence and compromise abilities, noting that the responsibilities of a dean are manifold and necessitate strong team building and extensive collaboration.
 - An attendee asked how the committee will proceed if applicants do not meet a minimum qualification threshold. Dr. Delitto expressed that, based on the current candidate slate, this scenario is unlikely, though explained that the committee would re-launch the search if viable candidates are not identified.
 - An attendee asked about bias for or against potential internal candidates. Another attendee added context that the majority of current SDM leadership was promoted from within, so stakeholders wonder if that will be the case for the next dean. Dr. Delitto replied that the committee has no preconceived internal or external preferences, and Ms. Vuturo added that the interview process is identical for internal and external candidates.
 - An attendee asked about the clinical background of the next dean. Dr. Delitto replied that the committee is searching for a candidate with clinical experience, though explained that some applicants do not currently practice. Clinical background/experience and appreciation are required, but the incoming dean does not necessarily need to be a current practitioner. Dr. Intini added that most candidates are unlikely to currently practice due to significant administrative responsibilities.
 - An attendee asked if the committee is searching for candidates who will generate revenue and increase SDM’s community footprint, and Dr. Delitto replied that Dr. Shekhar chaired the committee to identify a new dean who will pursue such outcomes.
 - An attendee inquired why community dental clinics have closed. Dr. Studen-Pavlovich mentioned she’s only aware of a clinic closure in the UPMC Mathilda Theiss Health Center. She added that other affiliation relationships have ended, though those facilities weren’t owned by the School.
 - An attendee asked if finances from dental procedures in UPMC facilities flow back to the School. Dr. Potluri replied that those funds move through University Dental Health Services.
 - An attendee asked how the committee can assess a candidate’s abilities to strategize and implement plans, describing a disconnect between determining real-world capabilities and a candidate’s CV. Dr. Delitto

agreed with this sentiment and explained the committee's aim to hear about a candidate's past accomplishments, vision for the future of dental medicine in Pittsburgh and beyond, and how their skills and experience would best serve Pitt. Interview and campus visit interactions are very informative, especially in assessing a candidate's communicative abilities.

- An attendee asked about RRA referencing and if trainees and junior faculty will be included. Ms. Vuturo replied that RRA conducts 360° referencing, speaking with peers, supervisors, and subordinates. She confirmed that full reference reports are provided to Dr. Shekhar.
8. Closing – On behalf of the committee, Dr. Delitto thanked participants for their time and feedback. He encouraged stakeholders 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 (j.spontak@pitt.edu). Dr. Delitto reiterated that he will provide status updates to the School when possible, while conducting the search with strict confidentiality.

Action Items:

(Optional) Submit questions/comments via the search committee's website:

<https://www.dental.pitt.edu/about/school-dental-medicine-dean-search>

(Optional) Email questions/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, 3/9/23.