



Government Media Statement

18 June 2007

LARA GIDDINGS Minister for Health and Human Services

Tasmania's First Professor of Oral Health Education

Plans to boost the sustainability of Tasmania's oral health workforce take another step forward today with the appointment of Professor Elaine Blignaut to a conjoint position in Oral Health Education between the University of Tasmania and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Health and Human Services Minister Lara Giddings and the Dean of the Faculty of Health Science, Professor Allan Carmichael, welcomed Professor Blignaut's appointment.

The position is jointly funded by the State Government and the University.

Professor Blignaut was recruited from South Africa, where she was Professor and Head of Stomatological Studies at the University of Limpopo – formerly the Medical University of South Africa.

Ms Giddings said the appointment of Professor Blignaut was a significant milestone on the path to resolving Tasmania's chronic shortage of dental professionals.

"Tasmania has suffered over the years because we have been the only state without university training for dentists," Ms Giddings said.

"A cooperative arrangement between Oral Health Services, the University of Tasmania and the University of Adelaide to provide practical training for dental students has produced a number of recruits who are now working here after graduation.

"The introduction of undergraduate education here in Hobart is expected to make an even bigger difference in future."

Professor Carmichael said Professor Blignaut's role would be to develop a curriculum model to enable undergraduate oral health education to be offered in Tasmania in partnership with an interstate dental school.

“Initially the focus will be on dentists, but the intention is also to provide courses at a later stage for therapists/hygienists,” Professor Carmichael said.

“These will be double-badged degrees, where students will complete some of their training in Tasmania and some at an interstate university.

“Our current planning is to provide the first and final years of the dental degree course in Tasmania with the middle three years interstate.”

Professor Blignaut initially will be based in Launceston, sharing office accommodation with the Clinical Director of Oral Health Services Dr David Butler.

She will move to Hobart next year following the construction of a new Oral Health Education and Service Centre at New Town.

Tenders for the Education and Service Centre close this month and work is expected to begin early in the new financial year, with completion due in the first half of 2008.

The Education & Service Centre will include:

- Six dental chairs –5 general chairs & 1 surgical suite;
- Study, lecture and resource room with associated computer facilities;
- Videoconferencing facilities to link to intra and interstate universities and other jurisdictions – including the facility to transmit demonstrations via camera from the clinical suite / simulation lab to lecture room;
- A simulation laboratory containing four mobile simulation heads;
- Office accommodation for academic staff, supervising dental clinicians and administrative staff;
- Reception and waiting area for clients;
- Sterilisation bay and store for consumables and equipment.

For interviews contact: Emma Bridge, ph. 6214 5424

Contact: Andrew Rhodes 6233 2757 or 0412 821 274
<http://www.tas.gov.au>