As part of a treatment planning seminar, Dr. Thomas Bloem (center) talks to graduate prosthodontic residents Drs. Zeina Al-Salih (left) and Dimitrios Chroniadis about various private practice perspectives when presenting oral health care options to their patients.

Dr. Thomas Bloem
DDS, University of Michigan, 1976
MS, prosthodontics, University of Michigan, 1978

Since practice management is important in dentistry, Dr. Thomas Bloem comes to the School of Dentistry twice a month for a discussion group meeting to talk about treatment planning from a specialty practice perspective.

A member of the Dean’s Faculty for three years, Bloem taught predoctoral and graduate prosthodontics for 17 years until 1996.

“Clinical skills are important,” he said, “but students also need to be practical in successfully managing their patients.” Citing the current economic environment, Bloem said it has become increasingly important for dentists to be adaptable.

“Today, a good practitioner will closely listen to what the patient is saying and, when necessary, offer options that help a patient reach his or her oral health goals. You have to embrace flexibility,” he says. That might mean, for instance, “working with a patient over a longer period of time instead of trying to complete treatment in the fewest number of appointments possible. You want the patient to reach their goals without abandoning the plan you share with them.”

Bloem says he enjoys talking to graduate students because “many times their perspectives are refreshing. It’s their willingness to learn and their curious nature that makes me willing to help.”

Active in dental organizations and a regional director of the American College of Prosthodontics, Bloem says he always emphasizes how crucial it is for students to give back to the dental profession. “I know how important it has been to me and my career, and I want to convey to students that this will be something that’s important for them and their careers too.”

Dr. Charles Murray
DDS, University of Michigan, 1955

“This is something I have been pleased to do for more than a decade. It’s my way of giving back to the dental school for all it did for me when I was a student at Michigan,” says Dr. Charles Murray.

A general practitioner in Birmingham, Michigan until his retirement in 1998, Murray was invited to become a member of the Dean’s Faculty about a year before retiring. Twice a week during the winter semester he travels to the School of Dentistry to teach first-year dental students in the Dr. Roy Roberts Preclinical Laboratory.

“The technology being used to educate students today is certainly more advanced than when I was a student,” he said with a laugh. “Today’s dental students are savvy when it comes to technology and, overall, are very sharp. We’re getting the cream of the crop.”

Technology aside, Murray says it’s been interesting to see how the composition of dental classes has changed since when he was a student.

“In the 1950s, we had only one female dental student in our classes. But today classes are about half male and half female,” he says. “I think that’s good because dentistry is one of those professions that offers a lot of opportunities to both women and men.”

Murray adds that teaching in the preclinic helps him to stay abreast of advances, both technical and scientific. “I enjoy working with the first-year dental students. They’re very appreciative of what you do for them.”