



Ladies and Gentlemen,

Based upon an informal observation, I realized that a significant number of those awarded with the title of Doctor Honoris Causa worldwide declare themselves "unworthy of such distinction", "perplexed" or "surprised" before being awarded this honorary title.

When, on the 18th October last year, Professor Pinhão Ferreira, Director of FMDUP (Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Porto) informed me of the Order of the Rector of the University of Porto, Prof. José Marques dos Santos, granting me the title "Doctor Honoris Causa", I was struck with exactly the same feelings of bewilderment and a sense of unworthiness.

I was even more surprised by the fact that the proposal was approved unanimously and acclaimed by the Scientific Council of FMDUP, as also happened in the consultation to the Senate performed by the Rector.

Therefore, all conditions were complied with in order to grant me the title of doctor honoris causa, which I then received from the Rector whom I thank, wholeheartedly.

Moreover, the fact that the UP, since its formal establishment in 1911, a century-old institution, despite the fact that its origins date back to the mid-eighteenth century, has always been extremely careful in awarding this title. Only a few dozen people in over 100 years have been chosen.

Without false modesty, I thought: Why now?

But I quickly realized that by awarding me at this time, the UP was exalting, in a timely way, a collective path that unequivocally deserves to be distinguished. An effort to which many have contributed since the mid '70s.

The path of dentistry in Portugal!

As this very special distinction is awarded to individuals, not institutions or legal persons, I greet it in a similar fashion, thanking gratefully the FMDUP and UP.

It is itself a genius and visionary initiative of two Professors, Afonso Pinhão Ferreira and António Felino, an additional milestone of enormous significance, and most relevant to the development and consolidation of dentistry.



Moreover, paradoxically, the recognition of UP itself, which knew how to keep up with the creation of the then School of Dental Medicine of Porto in 1976 and subsequently incorporate it as FMDUP. Thus, helping it to healthily evolve following international best practices, while respecting the autonomy that was essential to effectively pursue its mission: to promote the quality of dentistry and train competent dentists, following the “benchmark” in the field.

It is, also, the recognition, more than fair, of the path of many in the establishment of dentistry, having found in myself, possibly, the best placed recipient.

It is a huge personal honor to accept this tribute, to be distinguished in this way, even more for being the first dentist to be awarded.

Going back to the year 2000, when a group of colleagues from the Board of Directors of the newly created Portuguese Dental Association (OMD) identified me as being best placed, as candidate for President, to lead a list for the elections. I felt an indescribable excitement and enthusiasm.

After the election, I found a new and instrumental way of serving the profession to which I so well related.

Ever since, I have tried to identify and develop human resources, elected and hired, based on merit, which imbued with a similar attitude, could contribute and strengthen a path with the fundamental purpose of promoting the population’s literacy and oral health.

The context then was totally different from today.

Although there were in Portugal, back in 1999, already 7 dental faculties, in fact represented here in this ceremony, and thus a potential to train professionals that quickly proved to be excessive in relation to the needs of the country, almost everything else still had to be done.

Dental caries and periodontal disease (disease of the gums) affected more than 90% of the Portuguese population (as in much of the world).

Prevention policies were virtually nonexistent. The terror of visiting the dentist was felt by most of the population.

Let’s not forget that dentistry was, unfortunately, excluded from the National Health Service, since the mid-80s, and that this effort was made mostly in the private sector, in the liberal practice of the profession, which is still where the overwhelming majority of human resources are.

Portugal was still substantially a land of the toothless.



The impact of this reality on the quality of life of citizens was tremendous.

There was no awareness, even in some more informed sectors, of the relationship between oral health and general health, and vice versa.

The ability of dentistry to provide visibility to this reality was reduced concerning the media, public opinion and policy makers.

Oral health was essentially neglected.

From there on, a group of colleagues in the Portuguese Dental Association (most of them present here), in faculties and especially in their clinics and private practices, developed with commitment, a stoic effort to project dentistry and the recognition of the profession, both nationally and internationally.

I am proud to have led the Association, since 2001, as part of a number of teams to which dentistry is indebted.

I remember well, in various occasions, in presentations, official ceremonies, meetings, panel discussions, etc., having mentioned the importance of oral health and referring the institution representative of dentists (the Association) and I realized with surprise, the disdain and indifference with which my speeches were often received.

A lot has changed.

I had the privilege of not only witnessing, but also of being a committed actor in this change. I think OMD, an institution founded in 1998, incorporating its predecessor APMD, Professional Association of Dentists, succeeded, in approximately 25 years, under very adverse circumstances, in facing misunderstanding and even sometimes hostility from other professional groups, in establishing itself on a level that only few have dreamed of.

We cannot, however, forget to mention the public policies of education, prevention and treatment, through the National Program for Oral Health and Regional Programs, articulated with OMD, which contributed decisively to the improvement of oral health indexes of populations, helping Portugal to reach, in only a few years, the average of EU countries and the OECD.

Internationally, since the beginning I have felt that it was fundamental that the Association had an active role, participating in numerous different working and discussion groups in various fora and organizations, in fora representing the profession and in political, associative, professional and



scientific platforms, thus undoubtedly helping to modify the vision of our dentistry: from a vision similar to that of an underdeveloped country to a dentistry heading towards the forefront of knowledge, quality and credibility.

Today we are a country that produces knowledge and trains dentists, among the best in the world, automatically recognized in the European Union.

Even though without planning strategy...

Personally, I also had the privilege of being elected to various leading positions in international representative organizations, particularly the Council of European Dentists and the FDI World Dental Federation, the latter being the paramount authority on Dentistry and partner of the World Health Organization. Here are indeed two witnesses, two friends of this journey: the FDI Executive Director, Jean-Luc Eiselé and the president of the College of Dentists of Spain, Alfonso Villa Vigil.

The Foundation by the Association and the Federal Council of Dentistry in Brazil, of the Lusophone Dental Association, provided visibility in the Portuguese language and expression countries, to realities that closely concern us, in historical terms and of shared language, such as Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, East Timor and Macau not to mention Brazil, an authentic world power in this field.

Also, I realized, namely as President of CED and FDI, the enormous prestige that Portugal has worldwide.

This "capital" is highly underused by our country.

Only recently a different vision is being born, an awareness of the need to leverage this intangible but invaluable asset consisting of the remaining historical and linguistic heritage, or sometimes just a consequence of a set of ideas and projections that exist regarding Portugal and the Portuguese, in organized networking, mobilizing opinion leaders worldwide; not only embassies and consular bodies, but extending them to the promotion of a sense of being Portuguese and of development that must be projected beyond the bad, inconsequential diplomacy, towards a modern, necessary and essential vision of Portugal as a nation that exists far beyond territory, population and language.

A Portugal which is a pioneer of globalization cannot shrink to its rectangle and the comfort of its conventional frontiers.

I realized that, if we use our abilities, our strengths in an organized way and a new organization of our country, we can return to the forefront of civilization in many areas and activities, overcoming geographic, linguistic or even cultural boundaries.

Personally, I realized in the positions I occupied internationally, always elected and with opponents, that this "natural capital" is a key asset.

In my opinion, the University should be more involved in this challenge.

The UP has to be (and already is) increasingly a fundamental reference, from whom the city, the North, the Country and the Portuguese Diaspora much hope.

In the future, it should, in my point of view and given its size, more strongly look for increased projection, through internationalization and through a connection to civil society. Always in a perspective of excellence and quality, based on merit.

Countries are fundamentally their people, and investment in their training together with investment in their health are of the utmost importance.

If we fail to invest in these two aspects, one that ensures our future viability, and the other, health, that ensures our present viability, we are doomed to insignificance, to minority.

The form, the financial resources and others that need to be allocated to these investments should be cause for further discussion in Portuguese society.

However, we must be open to innovative concepts in the organization of the two systems, of education and health, more pervasive, more inter- and trans-disciplinary. Particularly timely and effective recognition of merit.

Education is the key. This is a message that occurs to me and that I would like to convey with full intensity.

I must say that at University I was a poor student. Not more than that. At the time, my attention was suffering fierce competition from other more mundane interests.

Nevertheless, the UP decisively provided me, as I wrote at the time of its centennial celebration, more than the transmission of knowledge or acquisition of knowledge; with a refined ability to think.

In addition to these aspects, it inspired in me greater tolerance, for example the integration of students from other places and other countries.

The UP gave me not only the medical competence, skill and ethics for the practice of a then very new profession, but equally, it gave me some ability to carry out, in parallel, an associative and political path, national and international. So, I am deeply grateful and I try to promote, not only the UP, but also the city and the country, in every possible way at national and international level. I'm still thankful to the UP for having helped me to develop a personal characteristic that I fully trust: my intuition.

This intuition is based, not only on knowledge acquired, but also on experience, common sense and in anticipating trends, is also what I look for in those around me.

This intuition, which proves essential especially when the information and the time are insufficient for making decisions, when the options are many, has never stopped helping me.

I combine it with the necessary approach in terms of public relations and diplomacy to carry out, mindfully, the regulatory missions contained in the Statutes of the Portuguese Dental Association.

This distinction gives me added strength and courage to continue to perform this mission with the enthusiasm and dedication that I have always devoted to the Portuguese Dental Association.

How good it is to continue to be part of this University.

This house will always continue to count on me.

Carpe diem!

Thank you very much.

Orlando Monteiro da Silva

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