Scientists from the United States, Europe, South America, Asia and Australia convened in Buffalo on September 10–12, 2004 to discuss the latest research on the relationship between periodontal disease and many chronic systemic diseases in a symposium honoring Robert J. Genco, DDS, PhD, an international leader in the field of dental research.

Genco formerly served as chair of the Department of Oral Biology at the UB School of Dental Medicine for 25 years. Currently, he is head of the UB Office of Science, Technology Transfer and Economic Outreach (STOR) and interim vice president for research at UB. In addition, he continues his own research.

“Contemporary Periodontology: Host-Pathogen Relationships in Health and Disease” was the theme of the meeting, held at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo.

Highlighting the symposium was a presentation by Lawrence A. Tabak, DDS, PhD, director of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR). Tabak, who received a doctorate in oral biology from UB in 1981, discussed the role of the NIDCR in advancing oral-biology research and directions that research may take in the future.

Commenting on Genco’s accomplishments, Tabak said: “The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research has funded Bob Genco’s work for about four decades. During that time, he has made important contributions in a number of areas, notably the integration of basic and clinical periodontal research, the immunology of periodontal diseases, and the association between periodontal disease and systemic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.”

Genco and his colleagues were among the first to report a connection between gum disease and heart disease and stroke and led studies relating infection to diabetes mellitus and obesity.

Currently he is principal investigator on a $7.3 million grant from the NIDCR to do preliminary studies and conduct a pilot clinical trial on the impact of periodontal disease treatment on prevention of second heart attacks. He is editor of the Journal of Periodontology and a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Science.

D. Walter Cohen, DDS, dean emeritus of the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine chancellor emeritus of the MCP Hahnemann University of Health Sciences was the keynote speaker at a dinner on September 11 that honored Genco. “Bob’s career has been so outstanding,” said Cohen. “He represents the ideal role model for a dental scientist and researcher, bringing together clinical practice and the basic sciences. We need more Bob Gencos.”

Richard Buchanan, DMD, dean of the UB dental school, and Hiroo Kaneda, chair and CEO of Sunstar, which supported the symposium, presented opening remarks at the dinner.

Sessions on September 10 covered the pathogenesis of periodontal disease and periodontal disease risk factors, as well as systemic effects of periodontitis on diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Sessions on September 11 were devoted to the association of periodontal disease and conditions affecting women, specifically osteoporosis and preterm birth, and to the contribution of periodontal disease to respiratory diseases and chronic inflammation.

—Lois Baker