

Spring 2021

PITT DENTAL MEDICINE

BUILDING DIVERSITY IN DENTISTRY

One Student, One Course,
One Conversation at a Time



Pitt Dental Medicine



PITT DENTAL MEDICINE

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"INCREASING DIVERSITY
in our student body and
profession **IS NOT THE**
JOB OF JUST ONE
PERSON, BUT MANY
PEOPLE."



— DR. CHRISTINE WANKIRI-HALE
ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

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IN THIS ISSUE

Building Diversity in Dentistry 5

Across the nation, more than ever, individuals and institutions are grappling with the concepts of diversity and inclusion. What does diversity mean? Why is inclusion important? What do diversity and inclusion look like? How do we get there? And why?

Dean's Message	3
Student NBDE Excellence	19
Pitt Dental Medicine Recognized With 2020 Gies Award for Outstanding Vision	23
Diversity by Example: The Culture of the Department of Oral and Craniofacial Sciences	25
FDA / ADA Grant Supports Pitt Dental Medicine Acute Pain Study	27
Faculty & Alumni Updates	29
Pitt Bio: Shan Bagby, Alumnus & Chief Dental Officer	30
Alumni Weekend 2020	35
Celebrating Our 125th Anniversary	37
In Memoriam	38



Dear Colleagues and Friends of Pitt Dental Medicine,

I am delighted to present the current issue of our Pitt Dental Medicine Magazine to you with exciting news in a number of areas. We are overcoming the obstacles caused by the pandemic and have capitalized on our people's ingenuity, creativity, and grit to forge ahead. Together, we have emerged from the sequestering, outpaced student experiences from the previous year, and refined curriculum and teaching methods to adjust to COVID restrictions. We thank you for your support of our students and the programs that help them become masterful clinicians.

In this issue, you will see a number of topics highlighted, including our focus on diversity with the greater University community. New leadership in

this area with an invigorated commitment creates a sustained approach to making sure we do our best to represent our greater community in the strongest way possible while making a greater impact for people from all communities. As we hopefully pull out of the pandemic, all of us have the chance to decide how we individually and collectively want to make a difference. We hope you will join us and support this important effort.

The people of Pitt Dental Medicine continue to give back to our communities even as we work to regain our stride after an amazing year of challenges. One of those ways we are looking to make a difference for our communities is how we approach managing dental pain. Pitt Dental Medicine was the first to have a school-wide opioid-free protocol for all of our clinics using evidenced-based protocols that guide our clinicians to make the best individualized choices for our patients in Western Pennsylvania and beyond. In this issue, you will see more of what our investigators are doing to help others make similar changes, teach best practices, accurately measure discomfort, and study what those changes will mean for our communities.

Our students are the future of dental medicine and we have high hopes, as well as great expectations, from this talented group. Pitt Dental Medicine students have been outperforming nearly 95% of all other dental students in the United States on the National Board Examination. Yet again, this shows not just their inherent intellectual abilities as a premiere group of students, but also what our faculty has done to deliver the platform for them to learn and perform at the highest levels. Congratulations on the continued remarkable success.

All plans changed when COVID-19 arrived, but I am pleased to report that we have found ways to

thrive, and to build and transform our vision to step forward. As you have seen in previous issues, Voice Your Vision is our living plan for taking Pitt Dental Medicine to the next level of success—driving us towards eminence. Critical to this effort is the cooperative work of everyone that is a part of the culture of our organization. It is not as much about what leadership will do for students, staff or faculty, but what we will do together to empower a cooperative interdependence that drives us forward. Together, we make each other stronger and better, and that has certainly been the case over the past year. One of my favorite things about Pitt Dental Medicine is the willingness of people to work together for each other and the collective success that we celebrate with the entire community. Despite our challenges, we have continued to focus on what we set out to achieve--namely, to build our programs through efforts in five key areas: re-imagining our curriculum, improving clinical efficiency with person-centered care, designing the facility of the future, enhancing our research programs, and building a culture of cooperative interdependence. The pandemic has altered the details of these plans, but not the principles that make us great. Interestingly, we also found ways to create innovative solutions that we could not have expected, like increasing asynchronous learning capabilities and creative scheduling allowing students to have more opportunity and flexibility.

Also in this issue, you will find faculty profiles, student news, and information about a number of happenings for our school, our alumni, and our community. We have new arrivals, accolades, and retirements to celebrate. Please also see our social media sites for the most up to date information.

We look forward to telling you more in person as we try to capitalize on new opportunities, and we look forward to partnering with you to make our

goals happen. In this issue, you will see some of what we have been doing. As we move forward, you can help us achieve our potential by contributing to these efforts. Help us engage the local community and world. Please consider donating to support our students at this critical moment when they need our help to become superior clinicians and work their way towards beginning their professional careers.

Yours in service,



Bernard J. Costello DMD, MD

Dean and Thomas W. Braun Endowed Professor

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BUILDING DIVERSITY IN DENTISTRY

ONE STUDENT, ONE COURSE,
ONE CONVERSATION AT A TIME

| By Keightley Amen, BA, ELS

Across the nation, more than ever, individuals and institutions are grappling with the concepts of diversity and inclusion. What does diversity mean? Why is inclusion important? What do diversity and inclusion look like? How do we get there? And why?

Like many professions, particularly in health care, dentistry is looking in the mirror—and finding that we have a diversity dilemma.

Research shows that people are more likely to seek regular health care from providers who share their language, culture, or background. They are more likely to return for follow-up care when providers demonstrate cultural competence and sensitivity.

But even though about 30% of the U.S. population is African American, Hispanic, or American Indian,

only 9% of practicing dentists are themselves underrepresented racial minorities. And only about 15% of applicants to dental schools nationwide are from those groups.

What's more, race is only one facet of diversity. If the dental profession is going to truly reflect the patients it serves, the workforce must include people of different races, cultures, geographic areas, gender identities, sexual orientations, socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, and more.



The University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine has been working for many years to increase diversity and inclusion within its ranks, says **Adriana Modesto-Vieira, DDS, DMD, MS, PhD**. But the school has recently intensified its commitment, including naming Dr. Modesto-Vieira associate dean for diversity, inclusion, and social justice.

“It’s going to be hard, and we don’t want to get lost in politically charged discussions,” she said. “Everybody is just getting used to listening and engaging respectfully in discussions, being open to more than just what they

were exposed to in their own lives. We can disagree, but being open-minded, respectful, and kind is very important.”

Working with the other five schools of the health sciences at Pitt, Dr. Modesto-Vieira is leading the efforts to ensure dynamic, diverse, inclusive approaches to recruitment, admissions, curriculum, recruitment, and student support.

Recruitment

To build a more diverse dental workforce, the school must create a pipeline of potential students from different backgrounds. Pitt's pipeline starts as early as middle school.

Christine Wankiiri-Hale, DMD, associate dean for student affairs, collaborates with other colleagues, schools, and programs at Pitt to run several programs to introduce students from underrepresented minority groups and lower socioeconomic backgrounds to potential careers in dental medicine.

"We provide opportunities for students to interact with dental professionals as early as their middle-school years because that shapes and forms their career interests and ultimately determines the courses they'll take later on in high school, which will prepare them to meet the requirements to potentially apply to a professional school," she said. "And we want students to have personalized opportunities and find an environment where they feel that they can flourish personally and academically."

The school runs programs through collaborations including:

- Investing Now, a college-prep program run by Pitt's Swanson School of Engineering to recruit high school students from groups that are historically underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics majors and careers
- The National Dental Association (NDA) encourages high school students to visit schools of dentistry, try hand-skills, and interact with dental students and faculty
- Southwest Pennsylvania Area Health Education Center, part of a national network that helps recruit, train, and retain a health professions workforce committed to underserved populations
- Journey to Medicine program, run by Gateway Medical Society, which educates and mentors minority pre-adolescent males in disciplines of medicine and allied health professions
- Pitt's Pre-Dental Science Club, an organization that introduces interested undergraduates to the dental profession



Through these and other programs, students from middle school through undergraduate level visit the dental school for several hours on evenings, weekends, or summers to interact with faculty, staff and students to get a sense of what it might be like to be a dentist, lab technician, dental assistant, or a dental hygienist.

“When the students try out the hands-on component in our simulation lab, drilling on a fake tooth on a mannequin, or pouring molds and making casts, they experience the science combined with the artistry of dentistry and then consider it as a career option,” Dr. Wankiiri-Hale said.

The school also offers virtual information sessions and attends recruiting events locally, regionally, and nationally, always staying on the lookout for potential students who could help form a well-rounded student body.

“We try to make a concerted effort to attend events where populations of underrepresented students will potentially be in high attendance so that we can be there and interact with them in a personalized and targeted way,” she said.



Joshua Cochran

As a white, straight male who comes from a middle-class family in Ohio and attended a small Christian college, Josh Cochran knows he doesn't seem like a representative of diversity. But his drive to make dentistry more inclusive and accessible is clear.

“There are a lot of ways in which dentistry leaves behind a pretty significant subset of the population who can't access dental care, whether it's because of ability to pay or geographic barriers or because some dentists have been apathetic to the needs of people in their community that don't look like them,” he said.

Although Cochran didn't experience those barriers himself, he has witnessed them and wants change.

Cochran married his high school sweetheart, Jessie, who is a racial minority. She's a teacher in the Wilksburg School District, in a Pittsburgh neighborhood that is mostly Black and has socioeconomic challenges. They attend church on the North side, another city neighborhood with similar demographics. Through their involvement in those communities, Cochran has seen the barriers and their effects.

Dental school coursework has also opened his eyes to the many ways race and ethnicity can affect health, such as much higher rates of cavities among Native American and Black children. “Prior to dental school, I didn't really understand,” he said. “But wide disparities exist, and I want to dedicate my career to working toward improving health equity.”

He plans to pursue a “civic-minded approach to dentistry,” hopefully working in a multidisciplinary clinic that uses a sliding-scale approach to payment so that people with lower socioeconomic means can get comprehensive care and better overall health.

But he's not waiting until graduation to apply his beliefs and work in the community. He participates in the Christian Medical and Dental Association, an international organization of dentists, physicians, nurses, and students in those fields. Also, he volunteers at the Squirrel Hill Health Center and for a group at his church that serves children with special needs. Through a leadership role in the American Student Dental Association (ASDA), he is working with fellow students and faculty to improve diversity in the admissions process, faculty, and curriculum.



Admissions

Perhaps the most vital step in developing a diverse profession is the process of reviewing and accepting applicants. The school has made a very deliberate effort to create an admissions workflow that focuses less on traditional numbers such as grade point averages and Dental Admission Test (DAT) scores. Instead, the various admissions committees aim to consider students holistically in a process that attempts to be equitable for all applicants by conducting extraordinarily thorough application reviews.

“When I think of a diverse class, I want to bring in the 80 most dynamic students that we can find,” said **Jerry McCombs, admissions manager**. “And there are so many layers within that.”

In addition to attributes usually associated with diversity, faculty and staff interviewed for this article cited many other factors that make applicants diverse:

- First-generation college student
- Student from underserved communities
- A unique “road traveled,” such as a challenging upbringing or the need to work instead of building a resume of extracurriculars, which can show an ability to be resilient and persevere and overcome adversity
- Religious affiliations and beliefs
- Nontraditional students who worked in another field or raised a family, then decided to pursue dentistry
- Students with a rural upbringing who are more likely to return to rural communities to provide much-needed care
- Students from all states across the nation and many countries throughout the world
- Those matriculating from colleges that are very well known as well as smaller schools that are not well known
- Languages spoken

The school receives about 2,100 applications each year to the predoctoral program and about 600 to the International Advanced Standing Program for international applicants. Some applications are up to 30 pages long, and the admissions committees spend an inordinate number of hours on application review. At least two members of the faculty, admissions staff, and current students read every single predoctoral application to



Susanna Merrill Keyes

As Susanna Merrill Keyes was considering potential fields of study, she did exhaustive research. After all, the 42-year-old mother of three was starting later than most, and she wanted to be sure.

“I earned a degree in history and classics many years ago. I was a stay-at-home mom for a lot of years, and then my kids got older and weren’t home very much. My time didn’t feel as important or fulfilling anymore,” she said. She decided to go back to school and build a career. But what field? “I wanted to do something meaningful—not a job where I’d just put in time and then go home. I wanted a career where I would use my mind, grow as a person, and help other people.”

So she did her homework, researching professions and interviewing friends. She considered being a lawyer or a therapist. She even flipped a house to see whether that was her calling. During a routine follow-up orthodontic visit with her kids, she discovered the possibility of dentistry. After another round of research, she applied, and the Pitt School of Dental Medicine admissions committee was supportive of her nontraditional path.

Although she and her family live three hours away from Pittsburgh, in a suburb of Harrisburg, she remains committed to the career she has chosen. She keeps an apartment in the city to help facilitate her studies and cut commuting time.

Keyes is a unique individual who is part of a class that is diverse in many other ways as well. She notes that students come from different racial and cultural backgrounds, life experiences, sexual preferences, and religious beliefs.

give applicants the attention they deserve. Eventually, a group of about 500 applicants are invited to interviews. Ultimately, only 80 unique individuals are admitted per year to the predoctoral class and roughly 8 are admitted to the Advanced Standing Program.

When it comes to diversity, the school doesn't set quotas. Rather, the leadership seeks to affect trends. For example, although the school doesn't intend to admit a specific number of female students, female applicants are consistently increasing, and women were 50% of the student body in 2019-2020. And while the school doesn't aim for a certain number of underrepresented minorities in each class, the predoctoral Class of 2024 includes 25.7% from such groups—trending way up from the 15% nationally reported just a few years ago. In addition, 25% of the students are first-generation college graduates, and the students hail from 19 U.S. states (half from Pennsylvania), six international countries, and 55 different colleges and universities.

Although the school expects to have representation from diverse gender identities and sexual preferences, those data are difficult to track. “For various reasons, they may choose not to identify

themselves in an application,” McCombs explained. “So we try to ensure that we look for these types of things based on the organizations the students were part of. We strive to remain open to answering questions and listening to their stories.”

The school has been working for years to achieve such a dynamic class, as an example:

- Conducting unconscious bias trainings for admissions staff and faculty
- Incorporating current students into the admissions process, and having them review applications from a different perspective
- Hosting an international program that admits dentists trained in other countries and folds them into the last two years of the curriculum so that they can practice in the United States
- Hosting panels and sharing contact information so that potential students can talk directly with current students, who can share their unscripted, personal, genuine experiences at Pitt



“Connecting potential students with current students allows them to really develop a keen understanding of what it’s like to be a dental student—the good, the bad, and the ugly—because you want to make sure ultimately that it’s truly a good fit for both the applicant and the school, versus something that is artificially manufactured and winds up not being a good fit,” said Dr. Wankiiri-Hale.



Charbel Khattar

Although students in the School of Dental Medicine often come from vastly different backgrounds, many have something in common: discovering the career when they were young patients in the dentist’s chair.

Born in Lebanon, Charbel Khattar moved to the United States at the age of three. For many years, he had a gap in his teeth that troubled him as he grew up. He finally had the gap fixed when he was 16.

“It was life-changing in terms of confidence,” he said. And it determined his future career. “I always loved the fields of science and health, but that experience showed me that I wanted to be a dentist. I liked the office setting, the teamwork, and the way they helped people.”

Khattar is a first-year student in the School of Dental Medicine—and the first in his family to get a degree. He acknowledges that “a more diverse student body is a work in progress.” But his background is a testament to the fact that “Pitt is very focused on student individuality.”

Also in progress are updates to the curriculum that will reflect individuality to improve patient care. In his first year in dental school, Khattar has learned a lot about the importance of person-centered care—a way of seeing the person, not just his or her condition. “Ethnicity and culture really affect people’s inclinations to receive care and how they interact with healthcare providers,” he said. “It’s a matter of trust versus apprehension.”



Curriculum

In the midst of the tensions that escalated after the death of George Floyd, a group of students wrote a letter to the School of Dental Medicine asking the leadership to work harder on several fronts. One call to action was more diversity and inclusion in the curriculum.

“This is a growth opportunity for us as a school, and we should embrace it. We’re doing good in a lot of ways, but we can do even better,” said **Jean O’Donnell, DMD, MEd**, associate dean for academic affairs. “We may not even think about some of these issues because perhaps we haven’t had to, and we may take a lot for granted. It’s really all about raising awareness.”

Much of that starts with the faculty. Dr. O’Donnell and **Joanne Prasad, DDS, MPH**, assistant dean for academic affairs, are working with the Curriculum Committee to ensure that all faculty review the level of diversity and inclusion in their course work, particularly case-based learning. One goal will be to include more racially diversified “standardized patients,” actors who pose as patients to help train students in patient interactions.

Dr. Modesto-Vieira is working with University faculty affairs on a proposal to recruit and retain a more diverse faculty. She also is preparing detailed faculty training on diversity and implicit bias. In addition, later this year, the school will hold a faculty retreat where one major theme will be brainstorming ways to introduce even more diversity and inclusion in the curriculum.

Changes will build upon several helpful approaches already in the curriculum:

- A two-term series in the first year of dental school that incorporates teaching and discussions related to social determinants of health, implicit biases, and sex and gender considerations
- A revamped curriculum that focuses on person-centered care (a concept that puts the patient at the center of a partnership with the healthcare team and uses the individual’s views, input, and experiences to improve overall health outcomes)
- A seminar course in the second year that expands on person-centered care and explores population health and healthcare advocacy



Kendra Rowey

Kendra Rowey was guaranteed acceptance into the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine, thanks to the eight-year Guaranteed Admit Program (GAP). Through GAP, a few incoming freshmen are automatically admitted to dentistry studies after undergraduate graduation, so long as they have maintained academic and other standards.

However, Rowey almost returned home to Missouri instead, because of the high costs of out-of-state tuition.

“There was no question about whether I would want to go here, the question was whether I could financially support that decision. That has to be part of the conversation and the equation,” she said.

The School of Dental Medicine granted Rowey a dean’s scholarship to help her make her longtime goal a reality. She will graduate in May, then pursue a general practice residency at the Cleveland VA.

Before she matriculates, she is working to make her future alma mater more diverse and inclusive. This year, she and fellow students wrote a letter to the leadership to encourage change. Since then, Rowey and others have met with deans and departmental leaders to:

- Find ways to interview and accept more students from minority populations.
- Brainstorm ways to provide support to those students once enrolled.
- Increase opportunities for diverse students to serve as ambassadors to potential students, including virtual panels and evening and lunchtime options.
- Make the curriculum more representative of diverse populations—in pictures, case studies, and simulations.
- Encourage hiring of diverse clinical and preclinical instructors.

Rowey’s interest in reducing health disparities is likely to shape her career. She envisions opening a general practice where she treats patients in a typical model up to 75% of the time, then invites patients from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in a partial public health model.

- Exercises in classes that help students understand complex challenges faced by individuals experiencing poverty
- Small-group discussions about ethics and cultural relevance
- SCOPE program (Student Community Outreach Program and Education), which awards credit for engagement with the community, such as attending events related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, or providing oral health care in federally qualified health centers that treat diverse patients with barriers to care
- Pathology topics that cover how some oral conditions exhibit certain medical differences depending on race, gender, or age
- Interprofessional forums with students in the other health sciences at Pitt, where students interact with actors portraying patients who have a variety of issues that impact access to care, such as finances, insurance, transportation, and childcare. The most recent forum featured a telehealth visit with a Black woman recovering from being hospitalized with COVID.

Retention and Student Support

Once they are admitted and diving into their studies, students from diverse backgrounds need various types of support to succeed academically and socially, no matter who they are or where they come from. Specific ways the school tries to help:

- Peer tutoring programs, initially intended for struggling students but now offered to all, in an effort to destigmatize asking for help
- Bridging and Bonding Beyond Dentistry program, where alumni offer mentorship to students who may not have had that type of guidance before, or for students whose mentors are not in the area
- Diversity scholarships as well as need based-scholarships,

especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may benefit from that additional financial burden to be reduced so that they can focus on school

- Student groups including but not limited to:
- Student National Dental Association, aiding in the advancement of minority students within the field of dentistry
- Hispanic Student Dental Association
- Smile with PRIDE, for friends of the LGBTQ+ community
- Asian Pacific Dental Student Association
- American Association of Women Dentists



The school's leadership is confident it can support its students by keeping a few principles in mind: asking students what they need, listening to them, and being approachable, said Dr. Prasad. For example, during the height of the coronavirus pandemic, the school surveyed students about the barriers they faced with online learning.

"That was illuminating for us as a group, Dr. Prasad said. "Some students have children at home, or maybe they felt embarrassed to have their video cameras on because it might reveal that their living arrangements are not as good as others'. It made us aware of different challenges in their home environments and in learning that our students might experience." The school acted on what it learned, extending exam times, offering technical support, meeting weekly with students to check in, and sharing resources for mental health during these tough times.



Toshiki Soejima

Toshiki Soejima had to work harder than most other students to get into dental school.

Born in Japan, he came to the United States rather suddenly as a third-grader, due to his father's job. "I came here not speaking any English at all. We lived in a small town north of Pittsburgh with pretty much no diversity, and the elementary school didn't have English as a Second Language."

In middle school, Soejima got his braces off and was hooked on dentistry. "I always thought going to the dentist was interesting. It was so cool—being able to make someone constantly smile again."

He eventually earned an undergraduate degree in biological sciences from Pitt, but his grades weren't good enough to be admitted to dental school. Instead of giving up, he got a job performing research in craniofacial genetics, examining genetic and environmental factors that may put people at higher risk of cleft lip and palate.

His story and commitment to the field impressed the admissions committee, and Soejima is now in the third year of the program. With his unique perspective, he also helps the admissions committee screen applicants, with an eye toward understanding and appreciating people who travel different paths. "We look at their statistics, but we also examine their backgrounds: where they came from, adversities they overcame, their overall story. They really focus on the holistic side of things."

Take Soejima himself. "My undergraduate grades weren't the strongest, but working prior to dental school helped me in terms of professionalism and maturity."

Conclusion

All of these efforts and more are contributing to the school's vital mission.

"We have to prepare them to be professionals in the dental field, expose them to what the true population of the country is, prepare them to treat all those different individuals and all the different traits that make people unique and special," McCombs said. "In four years, after they finish dental school, we want them to be proud of where they came from and to tell other people. We want our graduates to be comfortable saying, 'Pitt will set you in the right direction. Pitt is going to give you a great experience and help you build the relationships you need to be successful, regardless of your background.'"



How Can I Help?

"Increasing diversity in our student body and profession is not the job of just one person, but many people," said Dr. Wankiiri-Hale. "We welcome anyone who wants to become engaged in that process of recruiting the best and the brightest to the future of our profession, especially given the changing population."

Alumni and friends of the School of Dental Medicine can participate in many ways:

- Sharing your stories and ideas regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion in dentistry
- Welcoming our students to shadow you in practice and mentoring them
- Referring young potential students to our school if they might be interested in a career in dentistry, particularly those from diverse backgrounds
- Opening your practice for a day to treat patients who can't afford care or volunteer your services in programs such as Give Kids a Smile or Mission of Mercy
- Making any donation to the cause—big or small, general or focused. Donations to the **Underrepresented Groups within the School of Dental Medicine Scholarship Fund** will provide support to students from diverse backgrounds. For more information, please contact Erin Belitskus at ebelitskus@pitt.edu.

If you want to help or have other questions, please contact:

- dentaladmissions@denal.pitt.edu for admissions-related matters
- odisj@denal.pitt.edu to collaborate or volunteer for diversity events or community outreach



Dr. Vicente Telles

When Dr. Vicente Telles decided to move to the United States from Brazil with his American husband, he worried about discrimination. Not only because he is a gay man and already had been mistreated by the Brazilian military because of his marriage, but also because he would be an immigrant in a country that seemed, at the time, to be resistant to outsiders.

Despite a flawless record, Dr. Telles had been fired from his post as a dentist in the Brazilian military shortly after he married his husband. Although the decision was reversed shortly before his departure, the experience left him uneasy.

"I was worried about how Americans would see me, and I was really scared of how I would be treated as a dentist later on," he said. "I didn't know the U.S. was as diverse as it is, in a sense of how many immigrants you have here."

Upon arrival, he worked as a research assistant at the University of Pittsburgh and acclimated to his new life. Along the way, he was pleasantly surprised at how many other diverse individuals he met, including fellow researchers and his own healthcare providers.

As planned, Dr. Telles enrolled in the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine's Advanced Standing Program, which accepts up to eight people per year from around the globe who are already dentists in their native countries but want to practice in the United States. The students are integrated with the rest of the dental class for the final two years of study, then graduate with credentials that allow them to practice here. Dr. Telles' class also includes professionals from India, Syria, and China.

He quickly felt comfortable, welcome, and appreciated as an immigrant and as a gay man. Now, he helps lead the student group Smile with Pride, which organizes community outreach events from LGBTQ individuals in dentistry. Among the group's priorities are integrating transgender health into the curriculum, including training on proper pronouns and how hormone therapy can affect oral health.

"If everybody thinks the same, nothing changes. You won't grow," Dr. Telles said. "But when you bring together people from different groups with different perspectives, you create a better place for learning and become more innovative."



PITT DENTAL MEDICINE STUDENTS PERFORM EXCEPTIONALLY ON NBDE

According to pass rate percentage results for the National Board Dental Exam Part 1, Pitt Dental Medicine students have been exceeding the national average for years—a trend that has increased markedly over the past two years.

“They’ve always passed it the first time, but now they’re passing it at a very high level above the national average.”

—Dr. Jean O’Donnell
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

It's no secret that students at the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine do well on the National Board Dental Exam (NBDE), with the vast majority of students passing the tests on the first attempt.

For current and prospective students, that might be the only statistic they need to hear. But a deeper dive into the data provided to the school, which break down how well students perform on each section of the exam, showcases the caliber of Pitt Dental Medicine students and the positive effect of the teaching innovations happening throughout the school.

"It speaks volumes to the quality of education our students are receiving," said **Jerry McCombs**, the admissions manager for the Office of Student Affairs. "When you have a climate that really welcomes thought and collaboration ... you can feel the energy just walking down the halls—that says a lot about the learning environment."

That synergy translates into higher NBDE scores. And not just a little bit higher. A lot higher.

The fact that the school can boast a first-time pass rate of well over 90 percent is not news; the school has been fortunate that students always do well, even nearing 100 percent pass rates in recent years, according to **Dr. Jean O'Donnell**, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

But an annual report from the Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations, which administers the tests, shows how Pitt Dental Medicine students fared as a group compared to the national average in each content section of the exam, not just overall.

While they don't receive a student-by-student breakdown, Dr. O'Donnell noted, they can see how well they did as a school compared to dental schools across the United States. And when Dr. O'Donnell and her colleagues looked at the data for each content section of the exam, they noticed that students were not just eking out a passing score—in the past two years, Pitt Dental Medicine students were consistently scoring more than one standard deviation above the national average.

"They've always passed it the first time, but now they're passing it at a very high level above the national average," Dr. O'Donnell said. "I think we need to recognize our students. They are incredibly capable and engaged, and are doing very well."

In response to students achieving higher exam scores, the School recently surveyed alumni and students to ask what more faculty could do to help students better absorb what's being taught.

So, for example, after considering the survey responses, the instructor who teaches the course on occlusion—essentially, how your teeth fit into place and how they work together—realized that students struggled with the concept because they didn't

have any clinical experience. It's difficult to conceptualize what occlusion means if you can't see it. All those bumps and crevices on teeth "mean something," Dr. O'Donnell noted.

"It's a new language for these students," she said.

Another professor uses apps that quiz students—not for a grade, but as a check on understanding—to facilitate peer teaching and discussion when a concept is hazy. They also utilize 3-D tooth imaging apps and video so students can see the teeth and understand how they fit together.

As a result, Pitt students' performance within the dental anatomy and occlusion sections of the NBDE improved dramatically.

Anything within one standard deviation of the mean is a "totally fine performance," noted Dental Public Health Assistant Professor Dr. Deborah Polk, adding that Pitt Dental Medicine students had always hovered around the average in the dental anatomy and occlusion section.

Since 2016, however, scores in the dental anatomy and occlusion section have steadily increased.

"We've just seen sort of this exponential rise," Dr. O'Donnell said.

The trend is also apparent in the second part of the exam, which is clinically based. When learning about oral surgery and dental anesthesia, students get a lot of experience and classroom time. Pitt is one of the few schools in the country that has an accredited program in dental anesthesia.

The result? Pitt students have been solidly two standard deviations above the mean in the oral surgery and pain control section since 2016.

Pitt Dental Medicine introduced more case-based learning in recent years, which paid dividends on the oral pathology and radiology sections of the exam. For example, to explain to a student what a lesion indicates, the student needs to understand both what the lesion looks like inside the mouth and on an X-ray.

CHANGING THE EXAMINATION FORMAT

The exam format is changing in the coming years; current second-year students will take an integrated exam instead of the two-part exam administered now.

"We're very confident our students will handle the new integrated exam—which is case-based—very well," O'Donnell said.

The integrated version of the exam also will have a greater emphasis on public health, Dr. O'Donnell said, which plays to Pitt students' strengths thanks to a wealth of in-person clinical experience.

Proud to be Pitt Dental Medicine

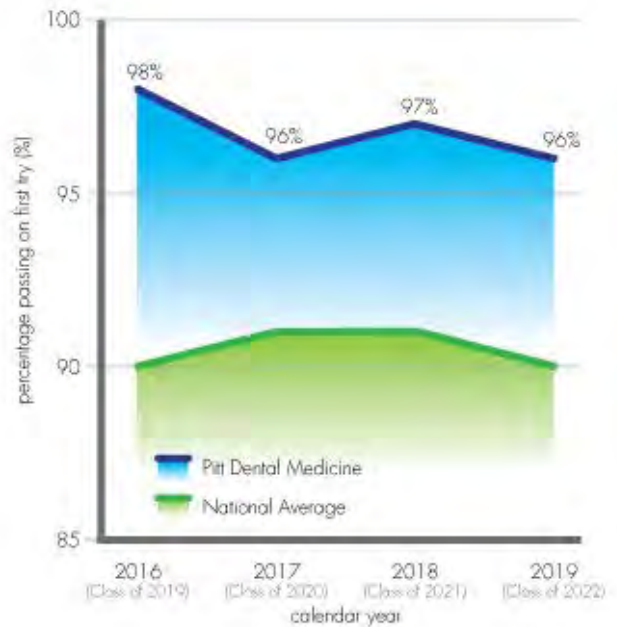
Pitt Dental Medicine Students have been outperforming nearly 95% of all other US dental school students in the annual Nation Board Exam.

According to pass rate percentage results for the National Board Dental Exam Part 1, we can proudly say that Pitt Dental Medicine students typically have exceeded the national average for years, a trend that has increased markedly over the past two years. Likewise, Part 2 exam pass rates reflect a similar trend, and discipline-specific results in all areas show performance rates at a significantly higher level than the national average.

National Board Exam Part 1 Scores



National Board Exam Part 2 Scores



These, of course, are just a few examples of where Pitt Dental Medicine students are succeeding; all disciplines have performed well above the national average in recent years.

THE IMPACT OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

“Our admissions process emphasizes a holistic approach where more than just academic scores are considered when accepting a student. What this means is we have students from a more diverse background with many different experiences who also exhibit academic potential—and have demonstrated they are exceptionally positioned to achieve the competencies needed to provide essential oral health care to our communities,” Dr. O’Donnell said.

This is especially relevant amid and in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Students now get lessons on how to properly use personal protective equipment and assist in the clinic during the very first week of classes.

Pitt Dental Medicine students are exposed to things that not every dental school has, including 10 specialties, a slew of elective

options, a recognized specialty in dental anesthesiology, a world-class faculty, and a holistic approach to recruiting students.

“Our students have a luxury with that approach that they might not be able to find at other dental schools,” Mr. McCombs said.

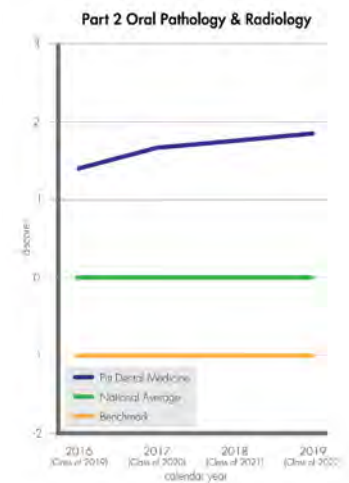
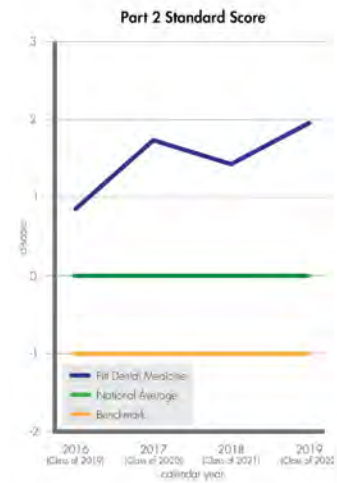
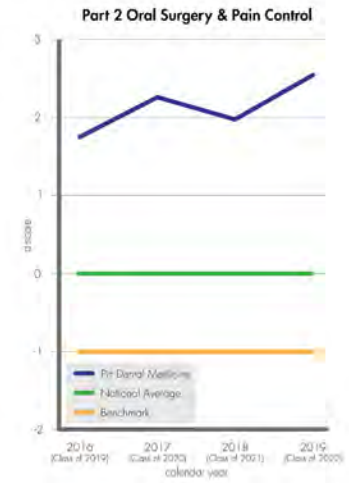
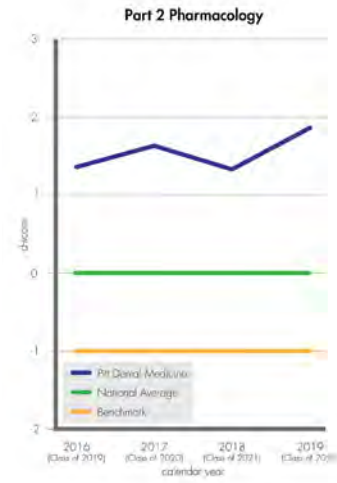
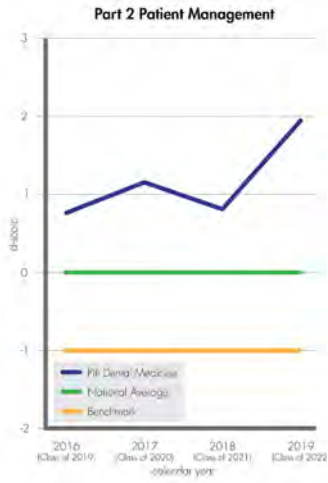
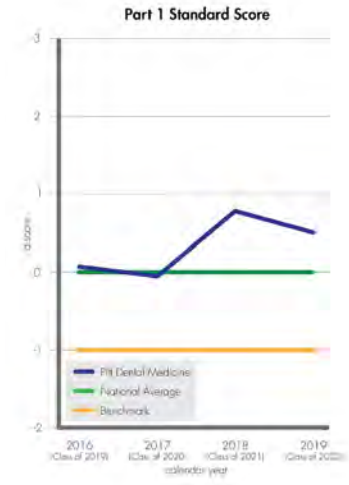
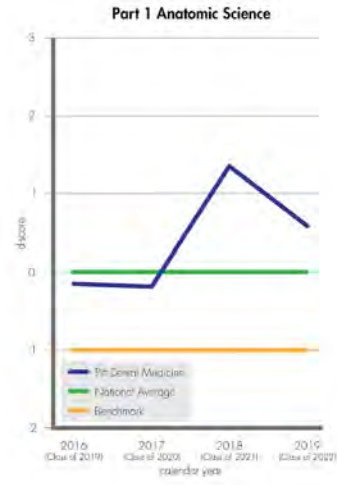
He noted that the increased board scores have attracted “very good talent,” allowing the school to emphasize increasing diversity among the student body.

“We want to make each student a priority from the moment they land on our radar or their application is received,” Mr. McCombs said, adding that the application and interview experience takes a personal interest in the applicants.

“They’re not just an applicant with a number,” he said. “They’re an individual person, and their journeys are all different and valuable.”

But no matter where that journey takes the students among the myriad options at Pitt’s School of Dental Medicine, one thing is for certain: They’ll almost certainly pass their boards with flying colors.

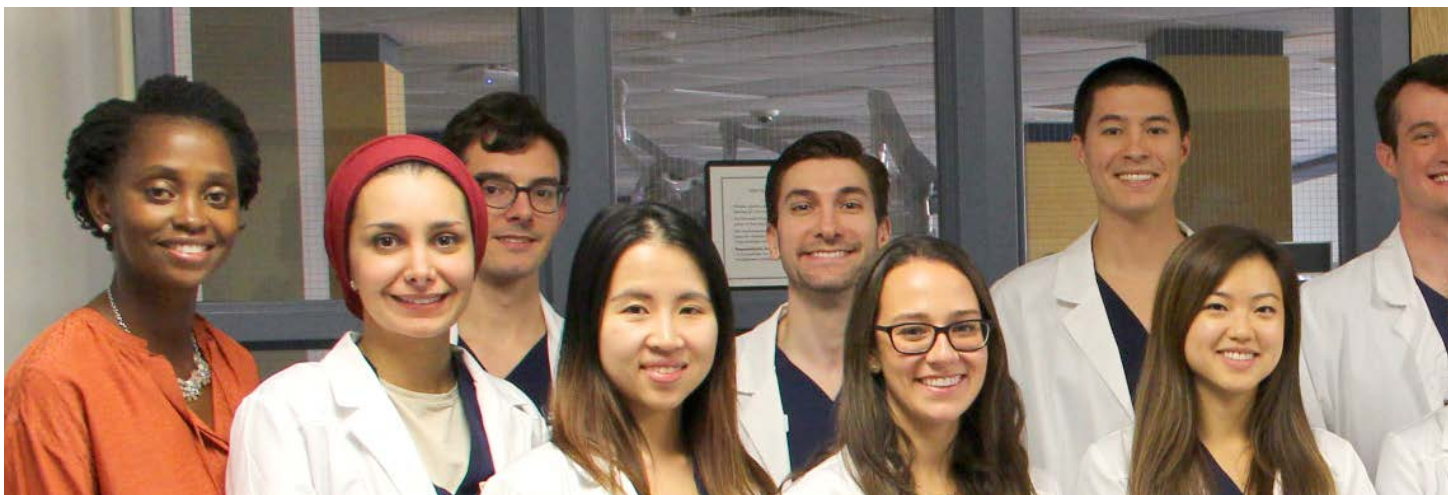
The graphs on this page represent various areas of academic focus over the past 4 years. In each is displayed a marked increase in overall Pitt Dental Medicine DMD student scores.



PITT DENTAL MEDICINE RECOGNIZED WITH THE

The University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine has been recognized as the recipient of the ADEAGies Foundation 2020 Award for Outstanding Vision by an Academic Dental Institution. The award acknowledges the visionary and innovative program that Pitt Dental Medicine developed, the Academic Career Track Area of Concentration (ACT ARCO) training program. The recognition of the ACT ARCO Program with the William J. Gies Awards for Vision, Innovation and Achievement took place on Friday, July 24, 2020, during a virtual event held by American Dental Education Association (ADEA).

The growing interest and increasing success of the Clinical Teaching Practicum inspired the development of a comprehensive program to fully prepare students for an academic career and equip them with skills in teaching, scholarship and leadership. In 2014, Dr. Zsuzsa Horvath, ACT ARCO Director, and Dr. Christine Wankiiri-Hale, ACT ARCO Clinical Director and Associate Dean of Student Affairs, developed a two-year certificate program rooted in a comprehensive curriculum that covered the three pillars of an academic career: teaching, scholarship and service. Notably, this program was developed several years before ADEA released



Dr. Christine Wankiiri-Hale

Addressing National Dentist Shortages

Pitt Dental Medicine has been at the forefront of addressing the nationwide shortage of dental educators by providing a robust training program in academic dentistry for students. To address future shortages, this comprehensive program was designed for students who are or may be interested in a career that trains them to teach future dentists. In 2012, the ACT ARCO program began as a single elective course, Clinical Teaching Practicum, for dental students to learn about teaching in dental education. This course has been offered every semester since then and became both beneficial and popular among students as they shared their positive experiences with each other, while student enrollment increased over the years.

its 2018 Policy Brief “Our Future Faculty—The Importance of Recruiting Students and Residents to Academic Dentistry.”

The comprehensive three-tiered program to train future dental educators offers three different ways for pre-doctoral dental students to prepare for a teaching career: a comprehensive, two-year certificate program (ACT ARCO); academic career track elective courses; and extracurricular activities. The program offers different opportunities designed to meet varied levels of student interest and commitment—from those who are resolute in choosing a teaching career to those who are just curious. Dr. Horvath’s philosophy is that the opportunity should be available to students to learn about and practice teaching when they are

2020 GIES AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING VISION

ready and their schedule allows. “We are very pleased,” said Dr. Horvath, “faculty support and enthusiasm for the program is now very high. Third- and fourth-year students are looking forward to developing and practicing teaching skills, and first- and second-year students see their peers as student teachers in preclinical courses.”

The School of Dental Medicine understands how much students crave such a learning experience and the opportunity to combine their interest in dentistry with teaching. “Not knowing what to

attention both in dental education and other health science fields. Initial program evaluations have been performed and published: Training Future Dentists for an Academic Career: A Three-Tiered Program (J Dent Educ. 2016 May;80(5):502-16), with the goal of providing a possible model for other dental and non-dental schools interested in initiating similar programs. This article was selected as one of the “Top Articles in the Journal of Dental Education: 2016.” This article also was referenced by Dr. Anthony M. Palatta in the editorial From Pipeline to Mainstream: Increasing the Number of Dental Students and Residents Pursuing Academic

ACT ARCO class of 2019



Dr. Zsuzsa Horvath

expect,” said Dr. Wankiiri-Hale, “the number of students in the program has far exceeded any of our expectations. Students express interest in the program as early as the admission interviews.” In addition, the program is one of the most comprehensive of its kind in North American dental schools. The number of participants has increased from 6 students at its inception to 16 students in the current graduating class. While it is still too early to assess how many students will enter academia, recent graduates report the benefits of the program during their residency training and in their first jobs.

The ACT ARCO and related three-tiered programs to train academic dentists have attracted national and international

Careers in the same issue. After the nationwide ADEA webinar, Preparing Future Faculty: The Time Is Now!, schools expressed interest in the program and currently, the ACT ARCO program serves as a model for adaptation at The University of Sydney Dental School.

Pitt Dental Medicine remains at the forefront of providing a solution for the shortage of academic dentists. The ACT ARCO, a visionary program, and the daily efforts of Drs. Horvath and Wankiiri-Hale in mentoring and working with students, deserve the recognition of the Gies Foundation 2020 Award for Outstanding Vision.

DIVERSITY BY EXAMPLE

By Annie Siebert

Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives rightfully took on increased urgency in the past year or so, but the Department of Oral and Craniofacial Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine was ahead of the curve.

As focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion spread throughout the University and nationally, “it came to my mind that we have a story to tell,” said Dr. Elia Beniash, Professor and Chair of the Department of Oral and Craniofacial Sciences.

As both the University and Pitt Dental Medicine aimed to improve diversity among students and faculty and set benchmarks to document their efforts, Dr. Beniash recognized that the department already had made significant progress toward these goals.

“I think that we are a very good example of this,” he said.

Recruiting the Best Students

The use of the Research Supplements to Promote Diversity in Health-Related Research program from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) showcases this. The goal of the program is to promote diversity in the U.S. biomedical research workforce. For M.Azat Alafandi, it meant the opportunity to pursue a graduate degree in oral and craniofacial science.

The native of Syria and Turkey, who qualified for the grant because of his economically disadvantaged background, had been accepted to the program when the pandemic coincided with changes in immigration policy implemented by the Trump administration. He was unsure if he'd be able to continue in the program unless he secured funding.

The faculty in the program applied for an NIH grant to fund Alafandi's tuition and health care coverage as a graduate student researcher.

Alafandi said that the department's demographics were what drew him to the program, adding that the diversity efforts are beneficial to his education.

“I didn't feel left out,” he said. “I didn't feel unequal to other students.”

Brent Vasquez, who is working toward a Ph.D. in oral and craniofacial sciences, said he likes to surround himself with diversified opinions, and the diversity of the department achieves that. He said it's compelling to see what “sparks interest” in different students and faculty with different backgrounds.

“There's a multi-textural collection of knowledge coming in,” Vasquez said.

Diversification Among Faculty

For Dr. Fatima Syed-Picard, an assistant professor in the Department of Oral and Craniofacial Sciences and a faculty member in the Center for Craniofacial Regeneration, said that the diversity among the faculty was one of the things that drew her to the program in 2016.

“It was great that even though it's not a huge department, there was already such diversity established,” she said.

But it wasn't limited to racial and ethnic diversity: The department also placed a focus on gender diversity as seen in the work of Dr. Mary Marazita, the director of the Center for Craniofacial and Dental Genetics (CCDG) and professor and vice chair of the Department of Oral and Craniofacial Sciences. Dr. Beniash credits the fact that the majority of the department's faculty are women to Dr. Marazita's work on gender diversity.

Dr. Syed-Picard noticed: She noted that there were women in successful leadership positions not just within the School, but among nationally recognized dental researchers.



Dr. Elia Beniash with Xu Yang, a former Oral and Craniofacial Sciences student.

She said it made the School and department very attractive as a place to establish a research program, adding that she felt like the existing faculty was “extremely mentoring” to junior faculty. After she realized it was easy to seek advice from other women on the faculty, she got a group of women from Pitt Dental Medicine together for tea to discuss forming a more formal organization of women at the School. Last year, the University of Pittsburgh Women in Craniofacial and Oral Research Group was born.



Brent Vasquez



M.Azat Alafandi



Dr. Fatima Syed-Picard



Dr. Alejandro Almarza

The group’s mission statement is to “support the interests and development of women working in the areas of dental, oral, and craniofacial research by highlighting research accomplishments, providing a network for communication, collaboration, and mentoring, and emphasizing the value of diversity and inclusion.”

The group collaborates with other departments and programs within Pitt, including the School of Medicine and Swanson School of Engineering.

Dr. Syed-Picard said both Dr. Beniash and the School of Dental Medicine’s dean, Dr. Bernard J. Costello, were extremely supportive of forming the group, which currently has 10 members—no small feat for a department with fewer than 20 faculty members.

Dr. Alejandro Almarza, an assistant professor in the Department of Oral and Craniofacial Sciences, lauded the focus on diversity for multiple reasons.

“The rest of the faculty definitely enjoy having that cultural diversity not only for socializing, but also for the science,” he said, adding that having other Latinx faculty “changes the dynamic.”

Dr. Almarza said the level of collaboration in the department is “quite exceptional,” and the varied backgrounds of the faculty and staff facilitate that. “I do believe that part of that is due to the diversity found both in gender and ethnicity ... in the department,” he said.





Experts at Pitt Dental Medicine Join Forces with the FDA and ADA to Better Manage Dental Pain

Dr. Deborah Polk, Pitt Dental Medicine assistant professor of Dental Public Health, has received a new grant from the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to develop new ways to manage acute dental pain. Titled Evidence-based Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Acute Dental Pain: Development, Implementation, and Evaluation Using Data Analytics to Target An Implementation Strategy, the grant runs from September 1, 2020 through August 31, 2023. Dr. Polk is the principal investigator together with Alonso Carrasco-Labra, DDS, MSc, PhD, senior director of Evidence Synthesis & Translation Research at the ADA's Science & Research Institute.

The FDA and the ADA have a history supporting treatment safety. Most recently, they have advocated for formal evidence-based “Clinical Practice Guidelines” to provide specific recommendations to dental practitioners that support maximum treatment benefits while minimizing adverse effects.

For managing acute dental pain, there is an urgent need to formalize the evidence-based alternatives to opioids in a clinical practice guideline, disseminate the guideline, and facilitate its uptake by providers through an implementation strategy. The long-term goal of this program of research is to increase providers' uptake of evidence-based approaches to clinical care.



“Dental providers always strive to manage their patients’ acute dental pain as best as possible. We hope the evidence-based guideline we develop will help dentists provide their patients the most effective management of acute dental pain possible.”

— DEBORAH POLK, PHD

This effort carries on Pitt Dental Medicine’s leadership in developing opioid-alternative pain management strategies with the goal, of course, to provide the best pain management for patients by using opioid-sparing therapies. In November, 2019, Pitt Dental Medicine Dean, Dr. Bernard J. Costello, positioned the school to provide opioid-free treatment for most of their outpatient care and became the first dental school nationally to develop and implement opioid-free prescribing guidelines for all clinicians at the school. Additionally, this important grant from the FDA creates a collaboration among Pitt Dental Medicine, the American Dental Association (ADA), and the Pittsburgh Veteran’s Administration Hospital.

Dr. Polk currently is working on two other grants, including an NIH-NIDCR-supported study, which together represent and expand upon her research interest in applying translational research using implementation science approaches. The NIH-NIDCR study is a five-year clinical trial seeking to determine how clinical practice guidelines can be adopted to improve dentists’ clinical decision making and patient outcomes. Her other grant is a collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh and Kaiser Oregon Health System.

“This collaboration of the FDA, organized dentistry, clinical researchers and dental education is a perfect partnership to determining the best opioid-sparing treatments of dental pain. With the financial support of the FDA and the expert advice of general dentists, ADA evidence-based experts, and dental specialists, a comprehensive document can be created that should be very valuable to general practitioners.”

—PAUL MOORE, DMD, MS, PHD, MPH, PITT DENTAL MEDICINE PROFESSOR EMERITUS



The objectives of the investigators are to develop a clinical practice guideline for the management of acute dental pain, develop and deploy dissemination and implementation strategies, and evaluate the effectiveness of those strategies in changing provider prescribing behavior. Upon completion of the project, It is believed that the field will have an established standard of care, patients will receive safe and effective relief from acute dental pain, and the risk of opioid diversion, opioid use disorder, and overdose will be reduced.

MESSAGE FROM THE PITT DENTAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

As my two-year term as Dental Alumni Association (DAA) president is coming to an end, together with this time in my career and life, I am more reflective and ponder my legacy. What will I leave behind when I leave my dental office and finally leave this world?

Last year, when I actually reached “retirement age”, I could’ve hung up my dental smock and bypassed much of the “COVID craziness”. But, I didn’t. I continued working and with the help of others, kept practicing.

There always will be unfinished business, but there will be some things that we still can do now to leave this profession—and ultimately this world—in a better place.

I’ve often told my daughter, Dr. Samantha Linkowski (DMD 2017), that as dental professionals we are given an unusual and awesome opportunity to touch our patients’ lives. We have a rare opportunity to improve their smiles, their day, their self-talk, and even the trajectory of their lives. We visit with them twice-a-year for many years, and sometimes, for many decades.

They become our “dental family.” Kids grow up in our chairs, get married, have children, and often their children’s children get to meet us. Often, they influence our lives as much as we do theirs.

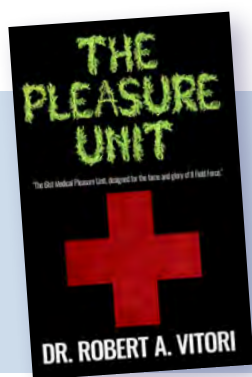
My dad, the late Dr. Robert A. Rosato (DDS '55), often would say, “Always give back to your school—it made you who you are today.” I am sure dad would support me if I add that we too should be grateful to all the patients who have positively impacted our lives and remained with us through all these years.

It’s easy to forget where we came from and forget the people that loved and supported us. It is especially important to thank the teachers, parents, spouses, and our “villages” for molding us into who we became. Thanks to each of you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your alumni president. May your legacy live on through the beautiful things you have done and the amazing people you have inspired.

Soon, I will be handing the gavel over to a wonderful and very competent guy, Dr. Samir Singh (DMD 2012), and I know he will do a great job!

Gratefully yours,
Cheryl Rosato, DMD '80

Dr. Elaine H. Berkowitz, (DMD '86) recently presented her virtual talk entitled “Implant Dentistry from the General Dentist’s Viewpoint” via Zoom to an audience that spanned Europe, including Italy, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Kosovo. Her presentation was part of Where Art and Technology Meet Excellence, the Second International Congress for Oral Surgery and Implantology.



Dr. Robert A. Vitori (DMD '63) chronicles his true experiences as part of the sixty-first medical detachment unit during the Vietnam War in his recently published book “The Pleasure Unit.” This honest and compelling true-life tale is available on Amazon and all proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to support the Pitt Dental Medicine White Coat Ceremony. If you would like to know more about supporting the White Coat Ceremony, please contact Erin Belitskus at ebelitskus@pitt.edu.



Oral History

The chief dental officer for the U.S. Army shares some of the wisdom he learned at Pitt.

WRITTEN BY ADAM REGER

This story was originally published in the Fall 2020 issue of Pitt Magazine

Some of the most formative lessons **Shan Bagby** learned at Pitt were delivered over a lunch table.

As a young man from New Jersey, freshly enrolled in the University's School of Dental Medicine, Bagby was excited to kick off his career. But his new surroundings would take some getting used to.

He soon met someone who helped him feel at home. Alonzo McDonald was an assistant professor in the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and had been one of the first Black oral surgeons to practice in Pittsburgh.

The two had many lunches together. "He really took me under his wing," recalls Bagby. "We talked about focusing on what you have in common with people. He was a real father figure, and it made all the difference."

It surely did, considering what Bagby (DEN '93) has accomplished.

Today, he's the chief dental officer for the U.S. Army, overseeing standards and policies for dental practice throughout the Army Dental Care System. Bagby is the first African American to hold the position. The decorated Army general—who has served for 31 years—manages an annual budget of \$8 billion and more than 1,000 practitioners tending to the dental health of 400,000 troops based worldwide. Now residing in San Antonio, Texas, he also serves as the principal advisor to the Army Surgeon General on all matters relating to dentistry.

Bagby acknowledges several mentors throughout his life, but the inclusive wisdom he received at Pitt helps characterize his leadership style, which is hinged on finding the humanity in others.

"We're meeting a human need," he says. "That's what dentistry is about."

"We're meeting a human need,
that's what dentistry is about." - SHAN BAGBY



DR. PAUL SCHWARTZ INSTALLED AS AAOMS VICE PRESIDENT

Paul J. Schwartz, DMD, (DMD '82 ADCT DSANE '84, ADCT OMFS '87) Assistant Professor in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and Dental Anesthesiology at Pitt Dental Medicine, was elected Vice President of the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS) for 2020-21 during the organization's virtual House of Delegates sessions in September. AAOMS is the professional organization representing more than 9,000 oral and maxillofacial surgeons.

Dr. Schwartz previously was District II Trustee, serving the Middle Atlantic States and the United States Military for the past four years. He also has served as president of the Maryland Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and examiner and co-chair of Medicine and Anesthesia for the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (ABOMS). Before joining Pitt Dental Medicine, he practiced full-scope oral and maxillofacial surgery in the Washington, D.C., metro area for more than 30 years.

"I am looking forward to my year as Vice President of AAOMS," Dr. Schwartz said. "As a trustee, I learned a great deal about AAOMS and meeting the needs of our members. I plan to use that knowledge to support and serve the Association's remarkable and talented surgeons."



CHRISTINE WANKIIRI-HALE (DMD '02)

The Pitt Office of the Provost-Graduate Studies sponsored an important panel discussion on Wednesday, November 18, 2020. The Perspectives of Black Faculty presentation provided attendees with a rare opportunity to hear first-hand information from Pitt's Black faculty members. During the virtual panel session, faculty members, including Pitt Dental Medicine Assistant Professor and Associate Dean for Student Affairs, **Dr. Christine Wankiiri-Hale, (DMD '02, ADCT AEGD '03)** shared insights into their own career paths and the graduate and professional programs their schools offer.

"I jumped at the opportunity to share with students my experience and journey as a panelist for the session in the Perspectives of Black Faculty presentation. As an alumna and current faculty member, my intention was to offer encouragement as well as plant a seed of opportunity to current and prospective underrepresented students regarding the different paths that the field of dental medicine can provide, including a career in dental hygiene, predoctoral dental training, advanced specialty training, oral biology and research, and academic dentistry. I hoped to emphasize that, in addition to myself and my co-panelists, our school encouraged current and prospective students to reach out to us for mentorship advice and guidance. I was grateful for the opportunity and look forward to continuing the conversation with students."

NEW FACULTY PUBLICATIONS



A manuscript was recently published by Pitt Dental Medicine assistant professor, **Dr. Fatima Syed-Picard**. Her research group focuses on stem cells and tissue engineering. The manuscript is entitled “*Dental Pulp Cell Sheets Enhance Facial Nerve Regeneration via Local Neurotrophic Factor Delivery*” and appears in the November 9, 2020 online publication *Tissue Engineering Part A*.



Seth Weinberg, Ph.D., co-director of the Center for Craniofacial and Dental Genetics at Pitt Dental Medicine, joined an international team of researchers to co-author a new paper that connects more than 200 genetic snippets with the development of specific areas of the face. The work appears in the journal *Nature Genetics* and is available on bioRxiv.org. In this study, the team found that many of the genes involved in creating typical facial features were the same as those implicated in facial malformations. These recent revelations may offer insights into the causes of facial malformations, the evolutionary origins of the human face and forensic reconstruction.

“In many cases, the overlap was striking,” said Dr. Weinberg. “We know which genes are involved in many syndromes where the face is affected in specific ways. We now see those same genes impacting the same facial features in the general population, but the effect is more subtle.”

PITT DENTAL MEDICINE FACULTY INCLUDED IN MOST INFLUENTIAL SCIENTISTS OF THE GENERATION LIST

In a recent PLOS Biology publication, authors John P. A. Ioannidis, Jeroen Baas, Richard Klavans, and Kevin W. Boyack present a database they created of the top 100,000 scientists with the intent to support standardized citation metrics. Included in this impressive list of the best of the best are Pitt Dental Medicine Faculty **Dr. Elia Beniash, Dr. Mary Marazita, Dr. Paul Moore, Dr. Alexandre Vieira,** and **Dr. Robert Weyant**.

The paper was included in the August 12, 2019 issue of PLOS Biology and may be viewed and downloaded at <https://tinyurl.com/yy8398sv>.



Dr. Paul Moore



Dr. Alexandre Vieira



Dr. Mary Marazita



Dr. Robert Weyant



Dr. Elia Beniash



PITT DENTAL MEDICINE ALUMNUS NAMED DEAN OF NSU FLORIDA

Steven Kaltman, DMD, MD, FACS, (DMD '73, ADCT OMFS '77) has been appointed dean of NSU's College of Dental Medicine where he had been serving as interim dean. Dr. Kaltman is strongly committed to making needed change and has a vision to ensure that the school advances its national prominence.

Dr. Kaltman is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine and completed his residency in oral and maxillofacial surgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and Montefiore University Hospital.

Over the course of many years, Dr. Kaltman has made significant contributions to the advancement of the NSU Florida College of Dental Medicine. He joined the faculty as professor and chair of the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery in 2000 and is the founding chief of the residency program in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, which now is a nationally-recognized training program.

Dr. Kaltman had the honor to serve as president of both the American College of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and Pennsylvania Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. He is a diplomate of the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and has been inducted as a fellow in American College of Surgeons and the American Academy of Craniomaxillofacial Surgeons.

2021 PENNSYLVANIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION RECOGNITIONS



R. Donald Hoffman (DMD '72, MEd '82, PhD '88) is the 2021 recipient of the Pennsylvania Dental Association (PDA) Recognition Award for his professionalism and dedication to the dental profession. Dr. Hoffman has served organized dentistry and higher education since 1972. Dr. Hoffman is a former Pitt Dental Medicine Associate Dean who inspired students and residents to be the best clinicians they could be.



Pennsylvania Dental Association (PDA) Distinguished Service Award 2021 has been presented to **Jay R. Wells, III (DDS '65)** in recognition of his leadership and service in his community and organized dentistry at the local, state and national level. Dr. Wells actively promoted water fluoridation in all PA communities. Dr. Wells has been described by the Dental Society of Western Pennsylvania (DSWP) as an “ethical, diplomatic, kind and hardworking volunteer.”



DR. LARRY CUNNINGHAM NAMED PRESIDENT ABOMS

Larry L. Cunningham, Jr., DDS, MD, FACS, Pitt Dental Medicine Professor and Chair of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, and Associate Dean of Hospital Affairs, has been named President of the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. Service the ABOMS for two decades, Dr. Cunningham looks forward to his future with the organization.

"It has been an honor and privilege to be part of the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery as a Diplomate, as an examiner, and as a Director for close to 20 years. The opportunity to serve as the President of this organization is humbling, but I am excited to continue the good work of the ABOMS with a group of wonderful staff and Directors."

The American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery has as its primary objective to elevate the standards of oral and maxillofacial surgery through a certification and a maintenance of certification process that fosters excellence and encourages learning, thus promoting the delivery of superior health care.

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UNIVERSITY DENTAL HEALTH SERVICES Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology Biopsy Service

For more than 40 years the Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology Biopsy Service has conducted consultation and tissue diagnostic services for the dental and medical communities of Western Pennsylvania. Our board-certified oral and maxillofacial pathologists provide a rapid, accurate diagnosis of your biopsy specimens.

- Call or e-mail to request your free biopsy kits
- Your detailed pathology report will be sent by fax or mail
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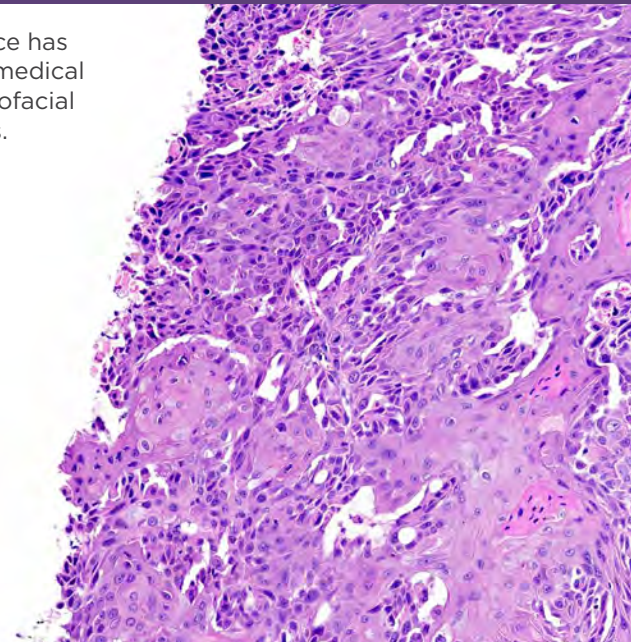
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Pitt Dental Medicine Alumni Weekend looked very different this year.

Thanks to technology we, together, were able to connect and maintain this happy tradition.

Thank you to everyone who participated in our virtual Pitt Dental Medicine Alumni Weekend and Homecoming events.

It is a long-held tradition to host a Dental Continuing Education course during Alumni Weekend. Last year, on October 23, **John H. Tucker, (DMD '82)** presented the live webinar "Sleep-related breathing disorders in your Dental Practice", which provided timely information on the prevalence, symptoms and consequences of undiagnosed sleep-related breathing disorders, as well as strategies to incorporate screening into the dental visit. It was a nice opportunity to earn CE credit virtually while spending time with Pitt Dental Medicine family. Saturday morning got us moving with Audrey Collins from Be Fit Pitt and the Healthy Lifestyle Institute during a program titled "Exercises for the Dental Professional". The presentation had us up on our feet and stretching our shoulders, necks, hands—it felt great. Webinars have been helpful in allowing us to include our many alumni who are no longer in the Pittsburgh area. We hope to see you at a future event!

Please be sure to check at dentalpitt.edu/alumni and dentalpitt.edu/125 for updates and new events as we celebrate our 125th anniversary with you.



Remembering Alumni Weekend 2019. We can't wait to see you all in person as soon as possible.

Tau Sigma Continues Supporting Homeless Vets

Each year, Pitt Dental Medicine Tau Sigma military club collects donations to help homeless veterans in the care of Shepherd's Heart Veteran's Home. This year, the student group collected \$500 in support of homeless veterans. The club, begun by retired Pitt Dental Medicine professor Dr. Robert Engelmeier right here at the School of Dental Medicine, has grown to more than 38 chapters at dental schools across the United States. Tau Sigma supports dental students through this national network of clubs through invited speakers and practical information that assists the transition from dental student to military career dentists.



Pitt Dental Medicine students in the Tau Sigma Military Club join retired professor Dr. Robert Engelmeier to deliver gift cards to Rev. Mike Wurschmidt to support homeless veterans in the care of Shepherd's Heart Veteran's Home.

Shepherd's Heart Veteran's Home provides transitional housing for homeless veterans located near downtown Pittsburgh. The program aims to serve male veterans who are homeless and may have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse problems, mental illness, dual diagnosis, and those who are disabled.

New dental.pitt.edu website



The Pitt Dental Medicine website— **dental.pitt.edu**—has undergone a redesign and was recently released. The new site serves as a stronger platform for improved user experiences and a powerful hub for Pitt Dental Medicine to share important information with our most meaningful audiences; our alumni, prospective students, and our patients.

The University of Pittsburgh Communications Web team assisted with this much needed update, replacing a website that was more than 7 years old. Technological advances of the past 5 years have been very significant and made our previous site feel outdated. The new site features University-approved templated pages and meets all Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG.) This process has helped us to greatly improve the user experience on the site and to incorporate the new Pitt brand, which may be viewed at **brand.pitt.edu**.



Bridging our Proud Past to a Bright Future

Pitt Dental Medicine celebrates 125 years of educating the best dental providers, improving the oral health of our community, and expanding the boundaries of knowledge. Learn more about our achievements that take place each day at Pitt Dental Medicine.

Explore Pitt Dental Medicine





BRIDGING OUR PROUD PAST TO A BRIGHT FUTURE

Celebrating our 125 years of improving oral health through education, patient care, and innovative research



Give Today. Transform Tomorrow.

On Tuesday, February 23, 2021, we began celebrating our 125th anniversary and celebrating Pitt Day of Giving.

Pitt Dental Medicine can only succeed when, together, we strive to make it the best resource available to our community for the next century. Together, we built our outstanding 125-year strong reputation because, collectively, we identified a shared responsibility for our accomplishments and how we move into a successful future.

“Together, we can create our future by cultivating a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration, diversity, equity and cooperative interdependence—but we need your help to make it there.”

-Dr. Bernard J. Costello
Dean and Professor

On Pitt Day of Giving, our Pitt Dental Medicine family—alumni, friends, faculty, staff and students—helped us begin our 125th year as one of our most successful yet by making gifts to the School’s initiatives that are most important to them..

The University of Pittsburgh and Pitt Dental Medicine are committed to building for the future. Innovation, discovery, intellectual property, patenting, industry relationships and entrepreneurial mindset are images that are included in many conversations around Pitt

today. The University is on the rise and setting records, and so is Pitt Dental Medicine.

The platform provided by the University—together with the intellectual capital at our school—creates an opportunity to make a substantial impact for oral and craniofacial health in entirely new ways. We are built for discovery and together can provide transformative cures, technologies and solutions to our toughest problems. Your gift to Pitt Dental Medicine supports our students and transforms our school for tomorrow.

You are invited to celebrate 125 years of improving oral health by participating in our many events, such as panel discussions and a golf outing.

Join the celebrations and see our events calendar at dental.pitt.edu/125.

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. Francis J. Aigner (DDS '56)
October 19, 2020

Dr. Theodore P. Corcoran (ADCT OMFS '91)
July 19, 2020

Dr. Robert W. Coy (DDS '57)
May 7, 2020

Dr. Richard E. DeForno (DMD '76)
July 27, 2020

Dr. James W. Eaton (DDS '57)
November 5, 2020

Dr. Lee Allan Flinger (DMD '80)
November 17, 2020

Dr. Thomas V. Gardner (DDS '55)
July 25, 2020

Dr. Robert F. Gilliland (DDS '63)
May 25, 2020

Dr. Lawrence T. Istvan (DDS '59)
August 25, 2020

Dr. Morris Jacobson (DDS '46)
October 14, 2020

Dr. Samuel L. Kerr (DDS '57)
October 17, 2020

Dr. Thomas E. Klena (DDS '64)
May 18, 2020

Dr. Robert F. Kooser (DMD '68)
May 21, 2020

Dr. Michael S. Kopenits (DMD '77)
September 3, 2020

Dr. Darrell J. Lewis (DDS '61)
April 19, 2020

Dr. Arthur S. Parys (DMD '75)
October 23, 2020

Dr. Peter P. Pavuk (DMD '65)
September 13, 2020

Dr. Theodore L. Rohm, Jr. (DDS '59)
November 26, 2017

Dr. Kathleen A. Romano (DMD '76)
January 23, 2020

Dr. Leonard Irwin Roth (DDS '58)
October 3, 2020

Dr. Henriette S. Sassouni (DMD '81)
Former Faculty
June 2, 2020

Dr. Howard Schiffer (DDS '46)
August 2, 2020

Dr. William R. Schriver (DDS '57)
July 28, 2020

Dr. David R. Shensa (DMD '66)
November 4, 2020

Dr. Abel J. Soster (DDS '63)
August 18, 2020

**Dr. Timothy Michael Spina
(DMD '73, ADCT PEDO '75)**
Former Faculty
September 9, 2020

Dr. Victor J. Surma (DMD '77)
September 6, 2020

Dr. Michael A. Swavey (DMD '87)
September 28, 2020

Dr. Charles H. Tessmer (DDS '55)
Former Faculty
September 11, 2020

**Dr. James C. Toye
(DDS '54, MS ORTHO '64)**
July 29, 2020

Dr. Robert E. Watson (DDS '61)
July 17, 2020

Dr. Bernard D. Whitsett, Sr. (DDS '59)
April 19, 2020

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Pitt Dental Medicine

University of Pittsburgh
School of Dental Medicine

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#PittDentalMedicine #ThankfulThursday

We love our Dental Hygiene students and love seeing them in the new Pitt Dental Medicine scrub caps that Pitt Dental Medicine instructor, Joan Witt, hand made for them.