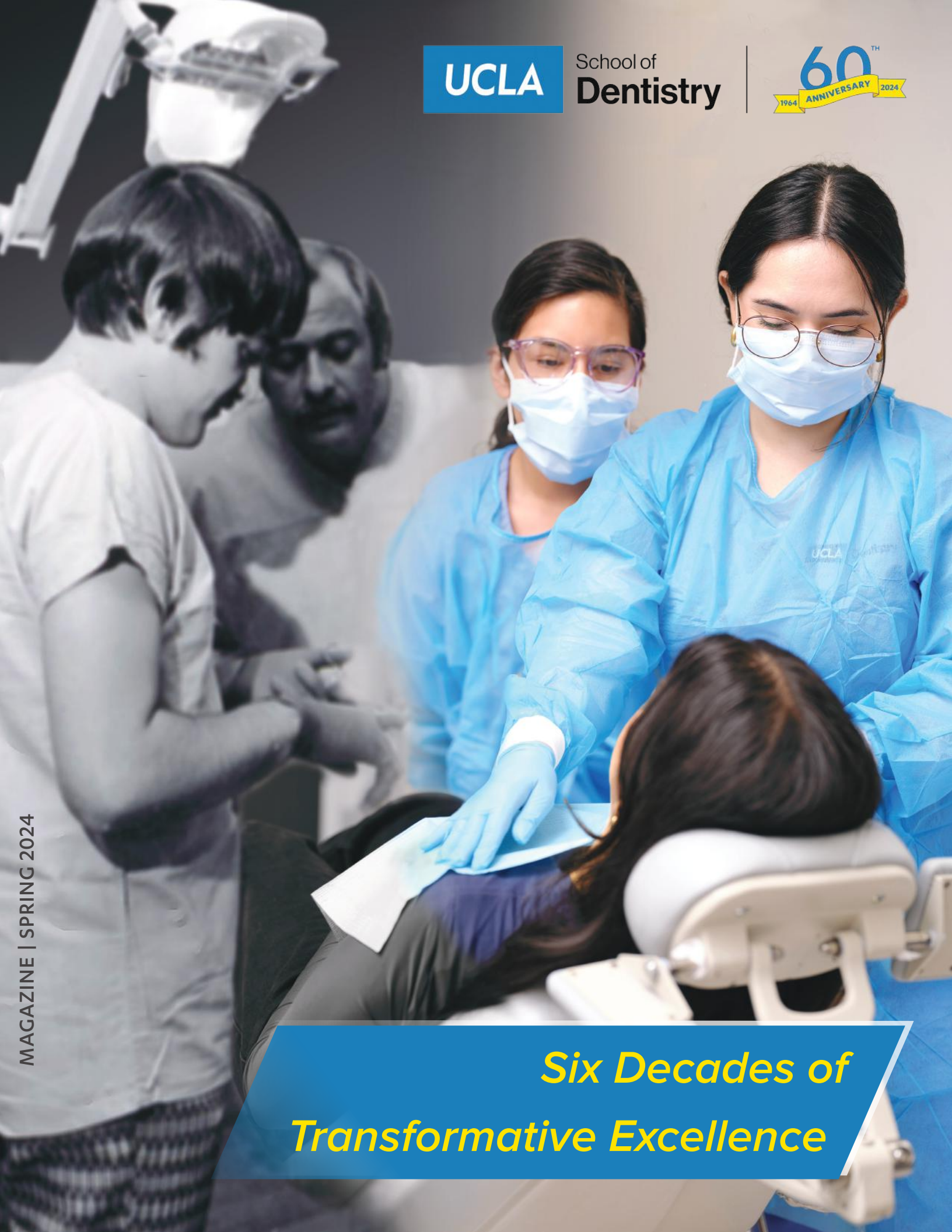


UCLA

School of
Dentistry



MAGAZINE | SPRING 2024

*Six Decades of
Transformative Excellence*



A Parallel Existence

As I sat down to write this message – an exploration of the UCLA School of Dentistry’s remarkable impact in six short decades – it occurred to me that I’ve lived a life in tandem with the School.

I was born in 1960, the same year that UCLA appointed Dr. Reidar Sognaes as the inaugural dean of its dental school, which was set to open four years later. An ideal hire, Dr. Sognaes left a similar position at Harvard, providing this new unit of our university with instant credibility ... especially as a research-intensive institution, given his considerable discoveries in oral pathology.

While I wasn’t yet conducting research in the 1960s, expanding scientific knowledge has sustained my career-long passion for health care and science. As I immersed myself in mineralized tissues at the cellular level and the self-renewal of stem cells at several peer institutions from the 1980s to 2000s, researchers at the UCLA School of Dentistry were making groundbreaking discoveries in oral and general health.

Implantology has been a particular strength, from our namesake UCLA Abutment, widely used by clinicians since the 1980s, to recent advancements in UV light treatment ensuring near-perfect osseointegration. In addition, some of the leading oral cancer

researchers have called our laboratories home. I’m equally proud of this School’s findings at the intersection of science and social good, such as enhanced understanding of how socioeconomic factors play a role in childhood caries.

Our parallel paths finally converged in 2016, when I was given the honor of serving as the School’s eighth dean. As I was already keenly aware of UCLA Dentistry’s research prowess, colleagues enthusiastically explained the substantial work supporting the School’s three other pillars of excellence: Education, patient care, and public service.

On the following pages, you’ll meet some of the best and brightest to call UCLA Dentistry home, both currently and among our alumni ranks. Three Bruin “wonder women” share how the profession has evolved to become more inclusive through the decades, while a collaboration across two specialty clinics has transformed one young patient’s life. Innovation is fully displayed through the MINDFUL Project, a first-of-its-kind initiative bringing critical dental treatment to long-term care facilities. Finally, circling back to research, Dr. Yvonne Hernandez-Kapila’s team has unlocked the incredible probiotic power of nisin and its implications throughout the body.

Consider this magazine a precursor to the main event: The UCLA School of Dentistry’s 60th Anniversary Celebration on Saturday, Sept. 28. I hope you can join us!

Sincerely,

Paul H. Krebsbach
Dean and Professor

ON THE COVER:

Stephanie Alvarado, D.D.S. '24 and Ann Gonzalez, D.D.S. '24, (right side, left-to-right) prep a patient, juxtaposed against Bruin trainees in the 1970s.

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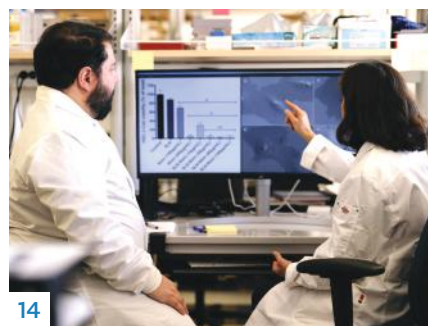
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THROUGH THE DECADES OF A *Diamond Anniversary*

1960s



Aug. 25, 1961: Newly appointed Dean Reidar F. Sognaes donned a hard hat to inspect what would soon be the home of UCLA's new dental school in the southeast corner of campus.



Sept. 30, 1966: Dedication ceremony for the newly-opened dental school, which included speeches, symposiums, and (pictured) a clinic open house.

A formal fundraising group for the school, the Apollonians (now the Apollonian Society), was established to support the dental student experience.



September 1970: Drs. Walter Shaw, George Shinn, Eugene Adams, and Linda Lott (clockwise from top left) enrolled as School's first four Black dental students, graduating together as members of the D.D.S. Class of 1974.



1970s

1980s



1988: A team of prosthodontists led by Drs. John Beumer, Steve Lewis, and Peter Moy introduce the UCLA Abutment. Allowing fabrication of the restoration directly to the implant fixture - bypassing the transmucosal abutment cylinder - this namesake abutment is still widely used today.



1989: The Wilson-Jennings-Bloomfield UCLA Venice Dental Center was established after three UCLA Dentistry Board of Counselors members (Bob Wilson, Gerald Jennings, and Bill Bloomfield) collaborated to purchase – and generously donate to UCLA – a building across the street from the existing Venice Dental Center.

Explore a detailed, interactive timeline of UCLA School of Dentistry history at



1990s

2000s

2010s/2020s

1997: Modernization of Westwood clinics into contemporary facilities with advanced technology and the foundation necessary to serve a growing patient population.



2004: Research grants awarded topped \$10 million for the first time.



In an effort to recruit and retain top faculty, a number of endowed chair positions were established: Jack A. Weichman Chair in Endodontics (2003), Dr. Thomas R. Bales Endowed Chair in Orthodontics (2004), Nobel Biocare Endowed Chair in Surgical Implant Dentistry (2006), Felix and Mildred Yip Endowed Professorship in Dentistry and Dr. No-Hee Park Endowed Chair (2008), Thomas K. Barber Endowed Term Chair in Pediatric Dentistry (2009).

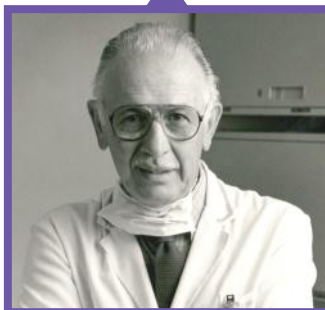
March 2020: The COVID-19 pandemic shifted classes to remote learning, however, thanks to established safety protocols, the School of Dentistry was among the first UCLA functional units to return to campus.



2013: The Center for Oral/Head & Neck Oncology Research, led by Dr. David Wong, was established to further his minimally invasive oral biopsy testing technology.



1991-94: Dean Henry Cherrick and Dr. Jay Gershen lobbied the House of Representatives to authorize the Health Resources and Services Administration's Dental Reimbursement Program for patients living with HIV and AIDS, while Dr. Frank Lucatorto (pictured) below authored several papers on diagnosing and treating oral lesions in HIV/AIDS-infected patients.





Wonder Women: From the Margins to the Majority

We celebrate the UCLA School of Dentistry's 60th anniversary alongside a D.D.S. student body that's 60% women. Meet two alumnae – and one to be – from different eras of the profession's gender evolution.

By Cyndy Lee Calverly

In 1897, a writer for the *Los Angeles Herald* warned that admitting women into what was then an all-male dental school would set a “dangerous precedent.” More than a century later, the demographics have flipped; the face of dentistry in this country has been transformed as the percentage of women enrolling in the nation’s dental schools has risen dramatically. In 2021, according to the American Dental Association Health Policy Institute, women made up 56% of first-year dental students, the highest rate in history at that time.

At the UCLA School of Dentistry that trend has only accelerated. Among its 24 students, the inaugural D.D.S. class of 1968 enrolled only one woman: Margaret Pan Quon, who remains actively engaged with the School to this day. In contrast, the recently-entering 2023 cohort of dental Bruins is 61% female and boasts the strongest academic credentials of any incoming class in school history.

The School’s humanistic approach to dental education has made it a leading choice for women, as it has adopted and refined a curriculum that combines cutting-edge science with the application of critical thinking and principles of social equity.

For many women, the seeds of highly successful careers as practitioners, researchers, and academicians were planted at the UCLA School of Dentistry. To mark the School’s 60th anniversary, we profile three alumnae at various stages of their professional journeys to discover how they found a pathway to success — an orthodontist (D.D.S. '73) on the brink of retirement; a professor (D.D.S. '92) who is one of the country’s brightest lights in oral and maxillofacial surgery; and a student (D.D.S. '24) with deep family ties to the School on the cusp of graduating.

Persevering and Reflecting:

Diane Milberg, D.D.S. '73

When Diane Milberg started dental school at UCLA in 1969 at age 20, she was the youngest student and one of only two women in a class of 96.

Starting dental school at that time was “akin to entering a well-established fraternity or men’s club,” she said. Raised in a sheltered environment with little voice of her own, she found it intimidating to be a female in a macho world. She quietly inquired about what it would take to switch to medical school, a step that would have set her back two years.

It was a difficult time when women were beginning to break into male-dominated professions and had to put up with sexist remarks, unequal treatment, and sometimes boyish pranks meant to test their mettle. “That was the mentality back then,” she said. And it brought occasional days of tears shed in private.

“Part of it was on me, because I didn’t have the tools to deal with it, and part of it was on society at a time when the world was changing. I was caught in the transition,” Dr. Milberg said. “But I thought that if I am going to do this, I’m going to have to stick it out.”

And she did, surviving the first two years of challenging coursework that combined anatomy, histology, and pathology, among other topics, with a rigorous dental education. “The basic human biology we covered has given me an appreciation of how the many aspects of the body work together. Even to this day, I can understand the intricacies of new medical advances.”

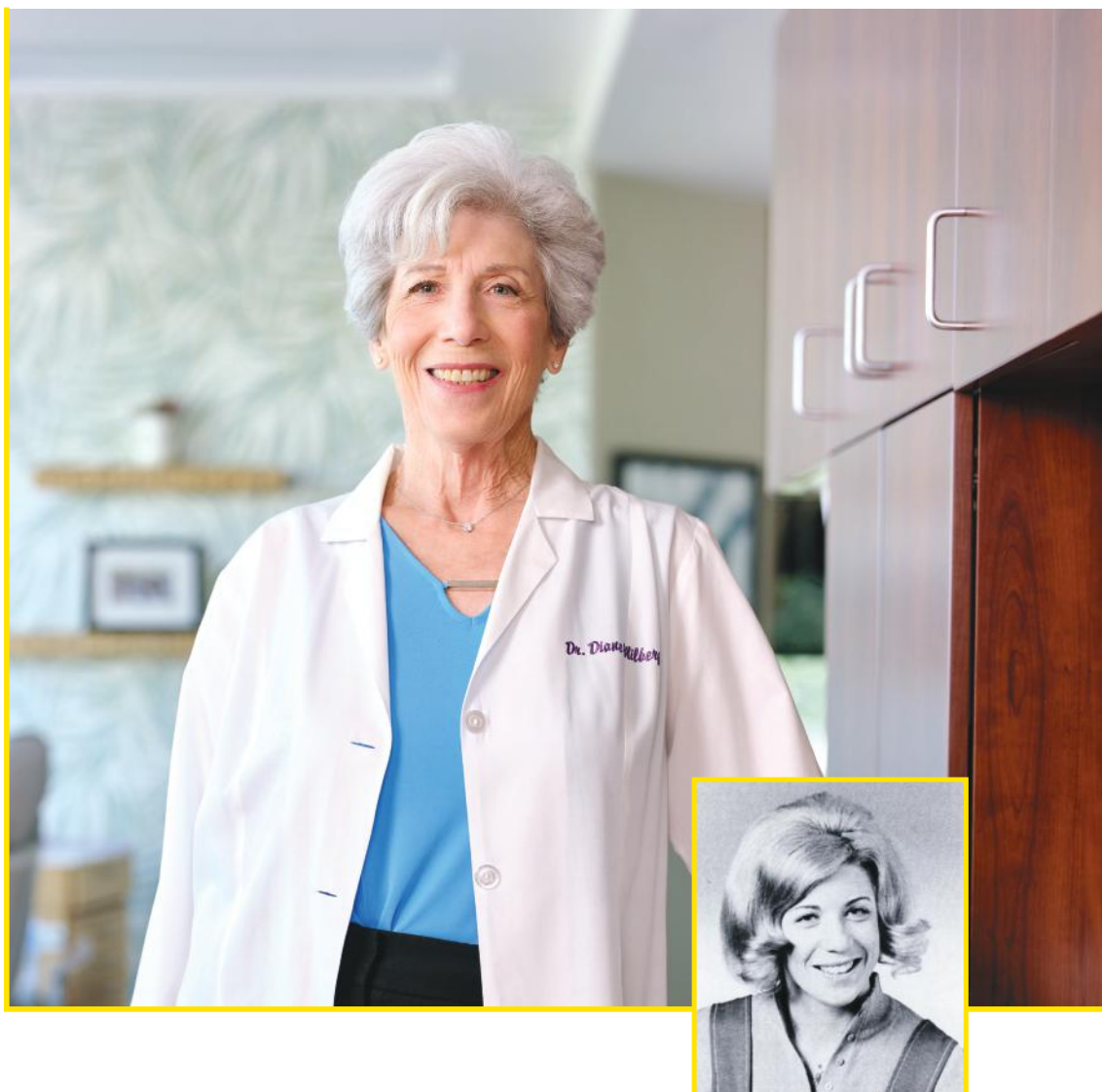
The pass-fail system used at the time “encouraged cooperative learning in our class,” with upper-class female students like Jean Savage, D.D.S. '71, and Teje Lindstrom, D.D.S. '72 lending her a hand. She recalled that

professors who worked part-time at UCLA while maintaining their own practices offered students “practical ‘pearls’ of knowledge,” that were much appreciated.

One experience left a lasting impression. Alongside classmates, Dr. Milberg traveled to an Arizona Navajo reservation, White River, to provide dental care to an underserved community. “I became very close to one of my patients and learned about her culture,” she said.

After earning her D.D.S., she headed for orthodontics residency training at the University of Washington, where she became only the second woman to be admitted into the program in a 30-year span.

In 1976 at age 27, she found herself as the only woman practicing orthodontics in the entire state of Washington. “Even when I started practicing, there were a lot of men who didn’t want to work with me because I was a woman,” she reminisced. Now in her 70s and living in San Diego, she works one morning a week at the orthodontic practice that her daughter, Laura, has now taken over from her. Dr. Milberg is a role model, not only



to Laura but to several former patients who have also become dentists and even orthodontists.

She's a longstanding member of the Edward Angle Society and a member of the American Association of Orthodontists. Dr. Milberg also helped plan the 50th-anniversary reunion of her UCLA class last year and rallied support for an endowed Class of 1973 scholarship. At their celebratory dinner, she grabbed the mic and did not hesitate to take some friendly jabs at her male majority classmates.

Looking back at her time in Westwood, she said, I feel I received an excellent education that gave me the basic tools to become an enthusiastic dental professional and enjoy my career."

Changing Course:

Anh Le, D.D.S. '92, Ph.D./O.M.F.S. '98

When Anh Le entered the UCLA School of Dentistry in September 1988, she had given birth to her second son less than a month before.

Some might call jumping into a rigorous, demanding academic program for a mom with a newborn a daunting challenge. But that didn't stop Le from following her family's agreed-upon course ... which was for her husband to continue his residency in internal medicine while she would start training for a career that would offer a more flexible schedule to raise their two sons.

"That was the plan," Dr. Le now says with a laugh. "It didn't turn out that way. I changed that career path when I entered UCLA."

In her second year, she found that new goal. After presenting a case at a research lab meeting, Le was pulled aside by the then-chair of oral and maxillofacial surgery, Dr. Charles Bertolami. Alongside colleagues, he was launching a new six-year program that combined an OMFS residency with a Ph.D. in oral biology.

He outlined a route that eventually led Le to become one of the country's foremost oral surgery experts.

"From that time on, I knew what my career was going to be. I was completely hooked," said

Dr. Le, who also counts UCLA's Drs. Diana Messadi and Earl Freymiller among her mentors.

"This was an important legacy that UCLA should be proud of. While people at the time were talking about building a pipeline to train academic surgeons, faculty at UCLA had the courage to establish it."

On the heels of being voted the School's "Woman of the Year in Dentistry" among her 1992 graduating D.S.S. class, Dr. Le became the first resident to enter this program, simultaneously conducting clinical research through a National Institute of Dental Research/National Institute of Health K08 grant.

"That was the best preparation for an academic career," she said. While doing her residency, she felt she could never miss a day of work because her co-resident would have had to pick up the slack. "It was very challenging at that time. Now, with this new generation, they have more privileges and more flexibility. It has improved significantly."



After holding faculty positions at Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science and the Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC; today, she is the Norman Vine Endowed Professor and chair of the OMFS/Pharmacology Department at the University of Pennsylvania and a Penn Medicine oral surgeon. Her research focuses on investigating mesenchymal stem cells from adult oral tissues. With collaborators, she isolated and characterized adult stem cells from gingival tissue, a stellar achievement that has opened up new research pathways with the goal of regenerating craniofacial tissue.

While more women are entering dentistry, one survey found that only 12% to 15% choose oral surgery, she said. And the reason many say they don't is the lack of mentors. Among her many professional affiliations, she is a fellow in the Hedwig van Ameringen Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (ELAM) Program for Women. She was selected as the UCLA School of Dentistry's Alumna of the Year for 2023.

"I consider myself so fortunate to have met the right people. UCLA was the perfect fit for me. But I am also driven," said Dr. Le, who worked in her family's San Diego restaurant after immigrating to the U.S. from Vietnam. "We work hard. We learn to balance our work and life. And we never compromise on anything."



A 40-Year Gap: Jordan Carfino, D.D.S. '24

Jordan Carfino, once a pre-med major, could have gone in a different direction than her mother and grandfather, both dentists in private practice. She never felt pressured, she said.

Ultimately, it was their love for their profession and her mother's ability to deftly balance family and work that set her on the same path. Carfino will earn her D.D.S. at UCLA this June before joining Columbia University's year-long Advanced Education in General Dentistry residency program.

"If I like dentistry half as much as they do, I'm going to be so content with my life," Carfino said, smiling.

Forty years before Jordan entered dental school among a female-majority student body, her mother, Dr. Toni Oliver-Carfino, enrolled at the UCLA School of Dentistry. Women comprised just a third of her 1984 D.D.S. class.

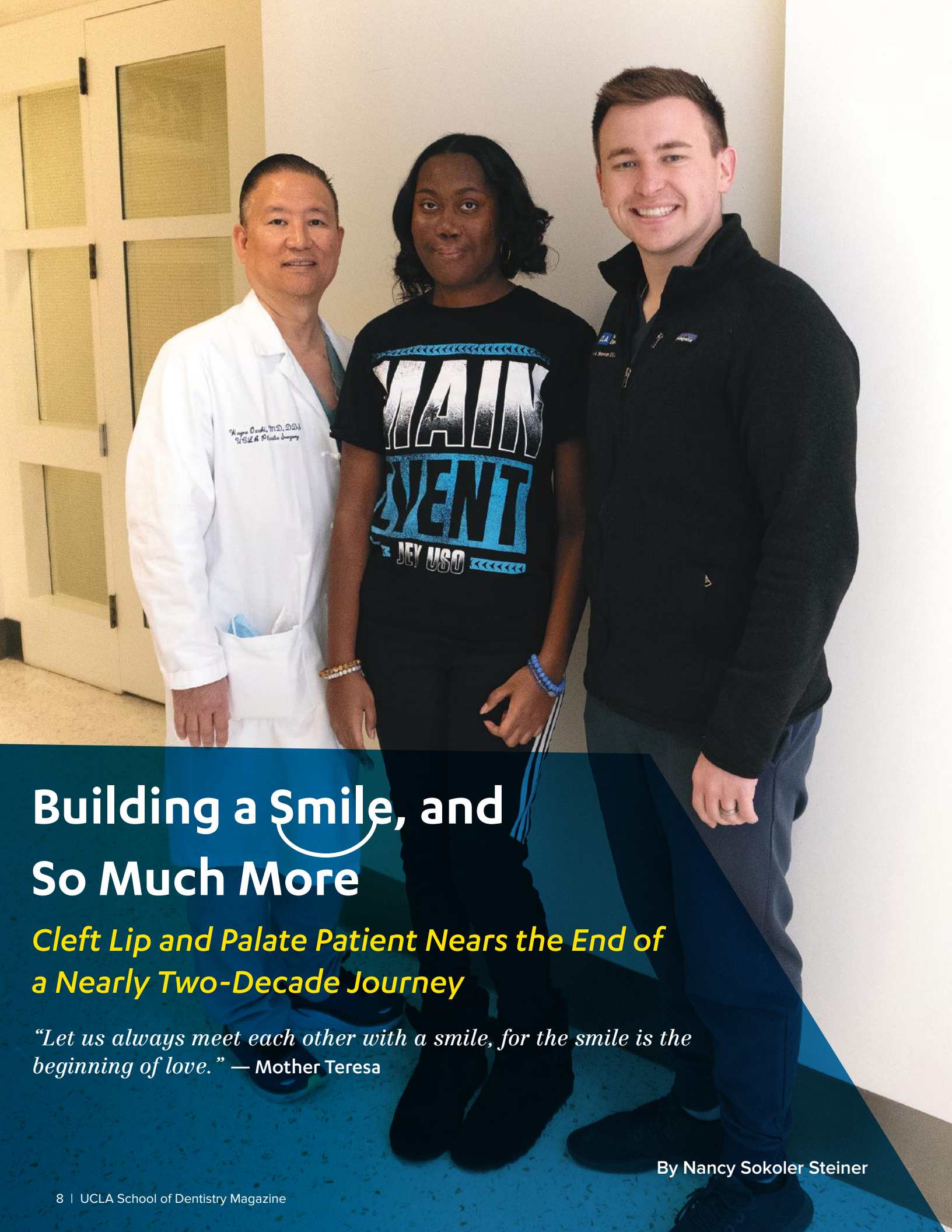
Dr. Oliver-Carfino felt her Bruin experience was enhanced by good advice, guidance, and encouragement from her classmates and faculty mentors, several of whom she's still in touch with today. She was recently asked by one of her mentors, Associate Dean for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Dr. Edmond Hewlett, D.D.S. '81, to serve on the new Black Alumni Association Board.

There are differences in the support system and the way students relate to each other, Dr. Oliver-Carfino said. These days, the School of Dentistry, for example, takes steps to encourage more women to pursue the profession and to create an environment where women feel welcome.

"I would say the support system for Jordan's class is stronger; they are a more cohesive group. We had our little group, and we were still cohesive, but it feels like they are closer to each other than we were," Dr. Oliver-Carfino opined.

Jordan also feels that one benefit of having so many female classmates is what they offer each other. "In certain stressful situations and for problem-solving, it's great. Faculty-wise, I've

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 23



Building a Smile, and So Much More

*Cleft Lip and Palate Patient Nears the End of
a Nearly Two-Decade Journey*

*“Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the
beginning of love.” — Mother Teresa*

By Nancy Sokoler Steiner

Having worn braces for nearly six years, Heavenli Mayfield still doesn't enjoy smiling.

However, issues with her mouth – and nose – preceded the orthodontic alignment and went far deeper. Mayfield, now 19, was born with a cleft lip and palate. The condition not only affected her appearance but had physical impacts as well.

Her treatment began in infancy. It's involved five surgeries, more visits to the UCLA School of Dentistry Westwood clinics than she can count, and support from the UCLA Health System to rectify her condition and bring about a cleft-free appearance she's becoming more and more confident about.

Chair of the School's Section of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Wayne Ozaki, M.D., D.D.S., and Orthodontics Resident Tyler Brennan, D.D.S. '22, Ortho/M.S. '25, are the practitioners currently collaborating to bring Heavenli's nearly two-decade case across the finish line.

Orofacial clefts, or cleft lips and palates, stem from a failure of the lip or mouth to form correctly. A cleft lip involves a separation of the skin and muscle between the baby's nose and lips, while a gap in the tissue making up the roof of the mouth constitutes a cleft palate. Both can vary in size.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in every 1,000 U.S. babies is born with a cleft lip and palate. A cleft lip can interfere with a baby's ability to feed and, later, with a child's ability to speak clearly. It can also cause problems with teeth and hearing, as well as frequent ear infections.

Mayfield's case was more complex because her cleft was in the middle of the lip rather than appearing on one or both sides. Her condition involved deformities of the lip, palate, and nose.

"Having a cleft lip affected my social life," she revealed. "When I was in second through sixth grades, I was bullied every now and then. It was mostly about my nose. When I was nine and in fourth grade, that's when the bullying was the worst."

Fortunately, she added, "I had a great group of friends who would remind me there's nothing wrong with me and that kids can just be mean."

"In general, when kids are young and have a significant deformity, they're more introverted and shy," said Dr. Ozaki, who has been following Mayfield's case since 2009. "As we do more surgery, they grow more confident and outgoing and feel better about themselves."

Mayfield was born at Harbor UCLA Medical Center in June 2004, so her condition was promptly recognized. At three months, she underwent surgery to close and repair her lips and nose, which improved her ability to feed. Another surgery to close the gap between her mouth and nasal cavity prevented further occurrence of fluid and food entering her nasal cavity. At the age of four, she had a bone graft to fill in the gaps caused by her cleft palate. Following that was a nose surgery at age nine to make breathing easier and improve the nose's appearance. And in January 2024, Dr. Ozaki performed her final surgery, this time to the jaw. The orthognathic surgery involved a maxillary osteotomy to move her upper jaw forward and a sagittal split osteotomy to move her lower jaw back.

"The surgery to correct her protruding jaw was both functional and aesthetic," said Dr. Ozaki, who holds a dual appointment as a clinical professor of plastic surgery at UCLA's David Geffen School of Medicine. "She can chew better because her teeth are aligned, and her face is balanced."

"When I was nine and in fourth grade, that's when the bullying was the worst. I had a great group of friends who would remind me there's nothing wrong with me and that kids can just be mean."

— Heavenli Mayfield

"Cleft lip and palate is my favorite surgery because it involves a lot of change. I like the continuity of meeting a child when they're a newborn, doing their surgery, and following their condition until early adulthood."

— Dr. Wayne Ozaki



“Dr. Ozaki and I worked on the surgical planning for Heavenli’s case. That included determining how we wanted to move the jaw and how I needed to move the teeth to achieve the best result.”

— Dr. Tyler Brennan

In a March 2024 visit to the Thomas R. Bales Orthodontic Clinic, Dr. Tyler Brennan bonded small buttons for Heavenli Mayfield to wear elastics, helping her bite fit properly after surgery.

Before he could perform Mayfield’s jaw surgery, however, Dr. Ozaki engaged Dr. Brennan – now in his second year of residency – to optimize the placement of Mayfield’s teeth.

“Dr. Ozaki and I worked on the surgical planning for Heavenli’s case. That included determining how we wanted to move the jaw and how I needed to move the teeth to achieve the best result,” Dr. Brennan said. “Surgical planning is a very collaborative process, where we use physical models, digital models, CBCT scans, and virtual surgical planning software to determine exactly what movements we wanted to do during the surgery as well as what movements I needed to do prior to it.”

In addition, Mayfield was missing a front tooth, so Dr. Brennan worked on spacing her front teeth to prepare the area for restorations, which will be undertaken by colleagues in the School’s Section of Restorative Dentistry. “At the end of the day, what Heavenli is going to see when she smiles in the mirror is how her front teeth look, so we wanted to set things up for an ideal aesthetic result.”

Dr. Brennan notes that the orthodontic team becomes involved in cleft lip and palate cases when children reach seven to eight years old and their permanent teeth begin erupting. “We take steps to develop their dental arch, and then the surgeon does a bone graft. Early surgeries take care of soft tissue defects, but these patients typically lack bone, and a bone graft helps provide the periodontal support the teeth ultimately need. We try to time that just right so the permanent teeth erupt into that repaired area.”

Dr. Brennan emphasizes that many doctors, including orthodontics residents, worked on Mayfield’s case before he became involved as a first-year resident in 2023. “I’m just lucky to

be here at the end and be able to finish it up,” he says. He anticipates that Mayfield will need only another six to 12 months of orthodontics to fine-tune her bite before she will complete her treatment.

Drs. Brennan and Ozaki both find working with patients like Mayfield professionally gratifying. “Some of the cases we do in ortho make a small difference for people: They have straighter teeth, which is great. But procedures like Heavenli’s are life-changing and make a huge difference,” Dr. Brennan said.

“Cleft lip and palate is my favorite surgery because it involves a lot of change,” Dr. Ozaki shared. “A lot of my surgeries involve solving a problem, so I only see the patient briefly. I like the continuity of meeting a child when they’re a newborn, doing their surgery, and following their condition until early adulthood.”

When considering where to complete his residency, Dr. Brennan chose to continue at UCLA due to his ability to work on craniofacial cases like Mayfield’s. In addition to hands-on training, he attended weekly craniofacial clinics where specialists including Dr. Ozaki, plus a pediatrician, a pediatric dentist, and an audiologist all see the patients together and discuss the cases afterward.

“Complicated cases are better treated in an academic environment, but I would love to treat simpler cleft lip and palate cases in private practice,” says Dr. Brennan.

As for Mayfield, she says: “I’ve been in treatment for a good while now. I’m truly excited to see the results. I feel like I’ll finally be comfortable and confident to smile showing all my teeth again.”

As she reflects on this experience, Mayfield – who is eyeing a future in veterinary medicine – appreciates the community UCLA Health helped cultivate for cleft lip and palate patients like her, both online and through in-person events. She also took time to acknowledge the veritable army of practitioners assigned to her case, including past orthodontic residents who have since entered private practice.

“It will be bittersweet once this chapter ends,” she said. “But I can’t wait to see what’s next for me and my new smile!”



Watch Drs. Ozaki and Brennan collaborate on Heavenli's complex case.



Only the biggest Bruin braniacs can answer the ten questions below! Need help? There are several clues embedded throughout this magazine

1



How many graduates comprised the inaugural D.D.S. class of 1968, and how many were women?

- a. 54 grads, seven women
- b. 28 grads, one woman
- c. 37 grads, 12 women
- d. 21 grads, seven women

2

What is the powerful probiotic that a UCLA Dentistry research team has discovered multiple therapeutic applications for?

- a. Lactobacillus
- b. Nisin
- c. Saccharomyces boulardii
- d. Escherichia

3

The School's fundraising organization dedicated to enhancing the student experience is called the:

- a. Dental Dynamos
- b. Apollonian Society
- c. Bruin Backers
- d. Pillars of Westwood

4



How many postgraduate residency programs are offered at the School of Dentistry?

- a. 11
- b. 19
- c. 13
- d. 9

5



The Community-Based Clinical Education initiative operates in which states?

- a. California
- b. Colorado
- c. Michigan
- d. North Dakota
- e. Texas
- f. All of the above

6



Who is this longtime oral and maxillofacial surgery professor?

- a. Dr. Harold Hargis
- b. Dr. Alan Felsenfeld
- c. Dr. Earl Freymiller
- d. Dr. Neal Garrett

9



How many floors of the Center for Health Sciences does the School of Dentistry span?

- a. Four
- b. Five
- c. Seven
- d. Nine

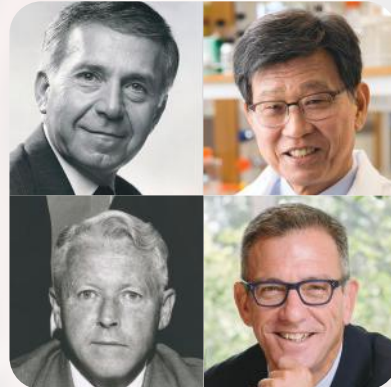
7



When did the UCLA Venice Dental Clinic – now the Wilson-Jennings-Bloomfield UCLA Venice Dental Center – open?

- a. 1969
- b. 1980
- c. 1989
- d. 2000

10



Who is the longest-serving dean in School of Dentistry history?

- a. Dr. Henry Cherrick
- b. Dr. No-Hee Park
- c. Dr. Reidar Sognaes
- d. Dr. Paul H. Krebsbach

8

The School’s oral health services to people living with HIV and AIDS - approximately 8,000 visits annually – are administered with support from which federal health care initiative?

- a. Affordable Care Act
- b. Ryan White Care Act
- c. Americans with Disabilities Act
- d. Medicare

Take the quiz and earn bragging rights among your classmates:



For those not technologically-inclined, find answers at the bottom of page 23.

Bugs as **Drugs**

Harnessing the therapeutic properties of nisin, an antibacterial peptide, Dr. Yvonne Hernandez-Kapila is making groundbreaking discoveries across oral cancer, periodontal disease, and beyond.



If one's lips are the front door to the human body, then the mouth is its foyer. Exposed to the elements, the condition of each entryway sets the tone for what is found throughout the structure.

"Although we have a great filtering system in the mouth, it's also very leaky, especially when you have disease," explained Dr. Yvonne Hernandez-Kapila, the UCLA School of Dentistry's

associate dean of research as well as the Felix and Mildred Yip Endowed Chair. "Gums are very leaky, so that allows an entry point for things outside the body to get into the bloodstream and affect systemic health."

The gingivae have been central to Dr. Hernandez-Kapila's career since embarking on a periodontics residency in 1990 at UC San Francisco, also her D.D.S. alma mater. That time period

was on the precipice of widespread research into the effect of the oral microbiome – encompassing archaea, bacteria, fungi, and viruses – on the rest of the human body.

Of the four, the oral virome remains the area most ripe for scientific exploration.

“Viruses are the most abundant species on our planet, and yet we still don’t know much about them,” said Dr. Allan Radaic, a project scientist in Dr. Hernandez-Kapila’s lab for seven years who made the move alongside her from UCSF to UCLA in 2022.

Unlike bacteria, which can be cultivated, it wasn’t until recent advances in genome mapping provided an opportunity to investigate the composition of viral communities. Just as important as discovering viruses is identifying potential therapeutics for them.

Leveraging previous findings that individuals with gum disease often develop comorbidities throughout the body, Dr. Hernandez-Kapila knew her research should focus on multimodal treatment; something that could mitigate bacterial growth, inflammation, and cell damage.

Concurrently, the past decade has seen considerable research on the diminishing effectiveness of antibiotics, as bacteria mutate and develop resistance. Pharmaceutical companies have drastically reduced their development budgets in this space – the last entirely original class of antibiotics was discovered in the late 1980s – largely because bringing these drugs to market is often unprofitable.

“On top of these two factors, we now know broad-spectrum antibiotics cause collateral damage to other microbes important for human health,” Dr. Hernandez-Kapila said. “Thus, the key to health is not to kill all bacteria,

“One of the wonderful things about nisin is that it’s a very small peptide. It punches holes – if you will – in the membrane of bacteria that allows for ingress of ions that basically kill the bacteria.”

but rather cultivate a balanced microbiota, reaching biosynthesis.”

Enter nisin.

First identified as a food preservative growing on cheese surfaces in 1928 – coincidentally, the same year penicillin was discovered – over the ensuing century this antibacterial peptide produced by the probiotic *Lactococcus lactis* has demonstrated a proven safety record, lack of any significant resistance development, and amenability to bioengineering. It was not until the past 20 years, however, that researchers have investigated its therapeutic use.

“One of the wonderful things about nisin is that it’s a very small peptide. It punches holes – if you will – in the membrane of bacteria that allow for ingress of ions that basically kill the bacteria,” Dr. Hernandez-Kapila said.

In 2015, while at the University of Michigan School of Dentistry, Dr. Hernandez-Kapila led the first-ever study into the effects of food-grade nisin on the oral microbiome. Testing different concentrations of nisin on diverse bacteria common to the human oral cavity, this powerful peptide interfered with toxic biofilm development and reduced biofilm thickness. Similarly encouraging, nisin showed no adverse effects on human cells in the oral cavity.

This study was among several authored by Dr. Hernandez-Kapila’s lab team demonstrating the importance of a balanced microbiota on systemic health ... Including its potential to inhibit oral cancers.

“I tried to find money for the longest time to study biosynthesis, but nobody believed in it. I remember talking to colleagues in the [Michigan] medical school; they’re like: ‘This is crazy,’” she said, reflecting on her research journey in the early 2000s. “Then scientific journals and the media started covering the microbiome, and things shifted to: ‘Oh, probiotics, this is so important.’”

In 2022, Dr. Hernandez-Kapila was awarded the largest research grant of her career, for perhaps her most ambitious endeavor to date. A five-year, \$5M study funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI)/National Institutes of Health (NIH) has the potential to make a society-shifting impact:

Our long-term goals are to validate nisin as a promising candidate for oral squamous cell carcinoma (OSCC) treatment and demonstrate that oral dysbiosis is a major driver of tumorigenesis in humans that can be manipulated, thus highlighting the important yet mostly unrecognized protective role that antimicrobials can exert against cancer in humans.



Take a trip inside the Hernandez-Kapila Lab and dive deep into the peer-reviewed research cited in this article.





The Hernandez-Kapila Lab team (l-r): Allan Radaic, M.Sc., Ph.D., Hossein Beheshti, Ph.D., Yoshimasa Taketani, D.D.S., Ph.D., Yvonne Hernandez-Kapila, D.D.S., Ph.D., Gabriela Beresescu, D.D.S., Ph.D., Pachiyyappan Kamarajan, Ph.D., Ross Barrios-Medina, B.H.S.

Cases of OSCC are increasing despite education about tobacco use and more vaccinations against the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) – two root causes of the disease – and its five-year survival rates have remained unchanged for decades. Dr. Hernandez-Kapila’s exploration of alternative, non-invasive treatment options complements the decade-plus work Dr. David Wong has done in the School’s Center for Oral/Head and Neck Oncology Research to detect cancer at its earliest stages using saliva testing.

“With surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy having such pronounced effects on oral cancer patients, including loss of function and facial deformities, these minimally-invasive diagnostic and therapeutic advancements being made by UCLA Dentistry researchers like Yvonne and David are critical,” said Dean and Professor Dr. Paul H. Krebsbach.

To secure funding, Dr. Hernandez-Kapila leaned on her foundational knowledge as a periodontist and demonstrated irrefutable links between oral pathogens and oral cancer. In 2020, her lab at UC San Francisco induced tumor growth in mice with three such pathogens – *T.denticola*, *P.gingivalis*, and *F.nucleatum* – before rapidly shrinking them with nisin. The control group showed no such abatement.

This evidence, coupled with a case study in which a human oral cancer patient self-administered nisin and demonstrated improved symptoms, including absence of pain and diminishing tumor size, helped Dr. Hernandez-Kapila and her co-PI Dr. Sue Yom at UCSF receive FDA approval last year to move forward with Phase I/II clinical trials. They began in March in Northern California, with subjects ingesting nisin in food or a

liquid, milkshake-like form. Data analysis will be conducted by the Hernandez-Kapila Lab team at UCLA.

Researchers hope this new treatment modality will pave the way for the use of antimicrobials as novel therapeutic approaches for multiple forms of cancer beyond the mouth and head and neck, given the known pathways from gingiva to bloodstream.

In preparation for potential FDA approval as an OSCC therapy, Dr. Hernandez-Kapila’s team is concurrently focused on upscaling the power of naturally occurring free nisin for widespread use. Enter Dr. Radaic, and his expertise working with nanoparticles and nanotechnology. “My role is to formulate solid lipid nanoparticles loaded with nisin – called SLN-Nisin – in a way that increases the effectiveness in treating diseases, and at

“The ‘a-ha’ moments, I think, came, in realizing that nisin has multiple effects,” she reflected. “Not only does it impact cancer cells, but it probably kills bacteria involved in cancer. And it also impacts the inflammation around cancer. I call it multimodal therapy.”

lower doses,” Dr. Radaic said of his work, which UCLA holds a patent for. A native of Brazil, he is one of many diverse researchers to train under Dr. Hernandez-Kapila, from Ann Arbor to Los Angeles to her hometown of San Francisco. As the daughter of working-class immigrants, Dr. Hernandez-Kapila feels a responsibility to expand pathways to increase pathways for the pursuit of scientific knowledge. Among many career honors, Dr. Hernandez-Kapila earned the American Association for Dental Research (AADR) Irwin D. Mandel Distinguished Mentoring Award in 2019.

Diving deep into nisin research has sparked her own curiosity.

“The ‘a-ha’ moments, I think, came, in realizing that nisin has multiple effects,” she reflected. “Not only does it impact cancer cells, but it probably kills bacteria

involved in cancer. And it also impacts the inflammation around cancer. I call it multimodal therapy.”

Exploring these numerous modes has led to multiple published findings beyond cancer treatment. Preceding the current focus on thwarting malignant cells was work within her specialty: Periodontal disease.

In a 2020 study, mice were given various experimental treatments, including nisin, to help researchers understand periodontal disease-related alveolar bone loss and inflammation. Dr. Hernandez-Kapila’s team found that both were mitigated by nisin, while also promoting the number of host reparative cells. This shifting of the oral bacteriome and virome towards a healthy state provided encouraging prospects for human periodontal patients.

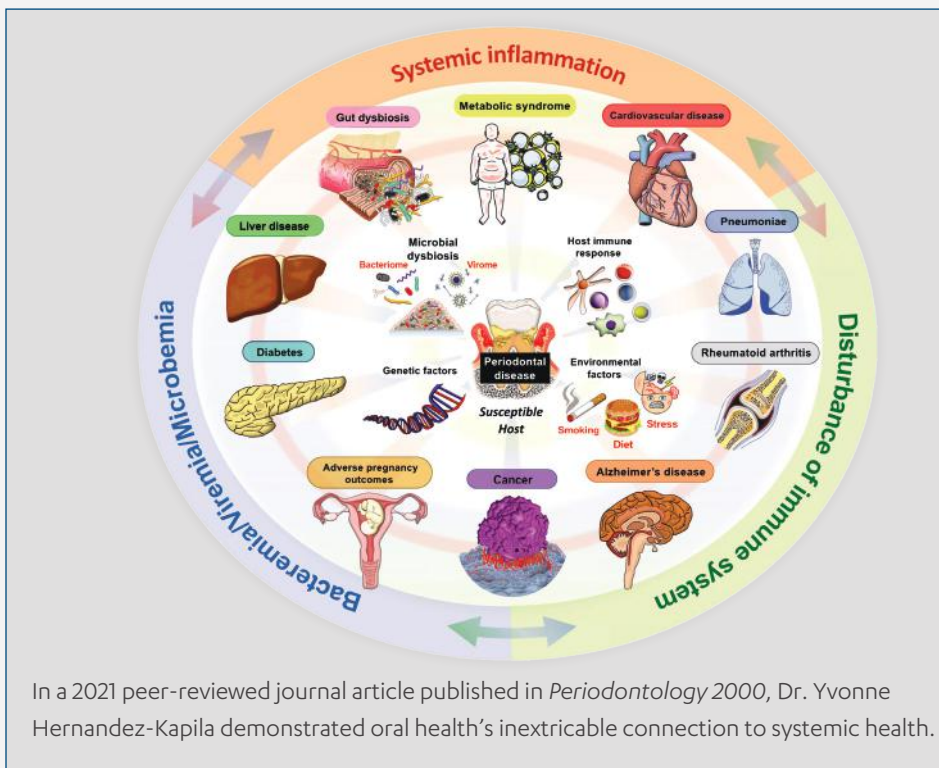
Further demonstrating the impact of oral dysbiosis – unbalanced microbiota – on the rest of the body, within the past year the Hernandez-Kapila Lab has authored peer-reviewed journals related to Alzheimer’s Disease and gut inflammation:

- Nisin, among its other capabilities, has also been found to reduce the number of pathogenic bacteria in the brain, which in turn mitigates the neuroinflammation known as a root cause of Alzheimer’s Disease.
- Periodontopathogens caused lesions in the liver and other organs of the digestive system, establishing the first-ever connection between tooth loss and the progression of liver disease. However, nisin was found to transform the affected microbiomes and serves as a “novel approach to treating NAFLD-steatohepatitis-associated periodontal disease.”

Dr. Hernandez-Kapila hopes that a successful clinical trial in her NCI-funded study results not only in a widely available oral squamous cell carcinoma therapeutic, but in the quick adoption of nisin-based remedies within each of her focus areas.

“I think once the safety and efficacy are determined, then it will be easier for these other applications to be approved. It sort of creates the right path where the FDA will say: ‘Oh, nisin was already tested safely, so now we want to test it to address fatty liver disease or to address Alzheimer’s disease,” she said, optimistically.

Already regarded as the first scientist to connect the brain, gut, and cancer to a healthy oral virome and microbiome, helping bring relief to patients across each of these areas will be a testament to her remarkable career as a researcher.



In a 2021 peer-reviewed journal article published in *Periodontology* 2000, Dr. Yvonne Hernandez-Kapila demonstrated oral health’s inextricable connection to systemic health.

A MINDFUL Approach to Compassionate Community Care

UCLA Dentistry students are receiving uncommon training experiences through a new initiative, bringing much-needed oral health services to residents of long-term care facilities.

By Nancy Sokoler Steiner



When Kiana Ghasemi, D.D.S. '24, learned she would be dispatched to Anaheim, Calif., for a rotation through the UCLA School of Dentistry's MINDFUL Project alongside its affiliate Golden Age Dental Care, she expected to feel out of her comfort zone.

A mobile dentistry service, Golden Age contracts with long-term care facilities to care for residents' dental needs.

"That's not a population we have much experience working with at school," said Ghasemi, a native of Toronto who left Canada two years ago to join the School's Professional Program for International Dentists aspiring to work in the U.S.

"This is not your typical brick-and-mortar dental practice, and these are not your typical patients. Students get the opportunity to treat a unique and very underserved demographic," said Health Sciences Assistant Clinical Professor Kelly Vitzthum, M.P.H., D.D.S. '20, and Director of the Community-Based Clinical Education (CBCE) initiative under which the MINDFUL Project falls.

MINDFUL stands for **M**obile care **I**n **D**entistry **F**or **U**nderserved populations **L**iving in long-term care facilities. The project aims to increase access to oral health services for older adults and populations with special needs, particularly those in long-term care facilities.

Like Ghasemi, Lauren Chapman, D.D.S. '24, found the MINDFUL experience eye-opening. She participated in the project's spring 2023 pilot launch.

"Some of these patients were bedbound or had arthritis, making it difficult to grip a toothbrush to perform their own cleaning. Some had cognitive disabilities," she recalled.

More than two-thirds of adults in the U.S. aged 65 and older have experienced periodontal disease, and nearly 40% of nursing home residents have no teeth, according to studies by the Centers for Disease Control and National Institutes of Health, respectively. The high demand for care exceeds the supply of providers willing and able to deliver comprehensive care to nursing home residents.

In addition to increasing UCLA Dentistry students' proficiency in treating these atypical cases, MINDFUL aims to inspire D.D.S. graduates to pursue community-based dentistry.

"In general, dental education doesn't do a great job teaching the next generation of dental providers about caring for patients with special health care needs, including those with significant medical complexities and those living in institutional settings," stated Vitzthum.

"The buck stops with dental schools. Research shows that if students have hands-on experience treating these populations, they're more likely to do so once they're in practice. Our goal, over time, is to make these rotations something every dental student can experience."

MINDFUL launched last year with Golden Age Dental Care, while a second MINDFUL rotation opportunity with Pacific Dental Services Foundation's special needs clinic in Arizona comes on board later in 2024.

"We've partnered with the UCLA School of Dentistry because there's a huge need for dental students to graduate with experience serving older adults and individuals with special needs," said Thomas Lovinger, Golden Age's CEO. "It's an ever-growing demographic, and there's a massive shortfall of dentists trained to serve them. Even if they won't be providing services in mobile settings, students with training will be equipped to serve these populations wherever they end up practicing."

The MINDFUL Program was made possible thanks to a \$1.67 million gift from the Delta Dental Community Care Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Delta Dental of California and affiliates. It's the organization's largest-ever single gift to a dental school.

"The buck stops with dental schools. Research shows that if students have hands-on experience treating these populations, they're more likely to do so once they're in practice."

– Dr. Kelly Vitzthum, director of UCLA Dentistry's Community-Based Clinical Education

Opposite page: Kiana Ghasemi, D.D.S. '24, provides an oral examination to 64-year-old Cynthia Harvey at the Anaheim Health Care Center, an assisted living facility.



It Takes a Village: Kiana Ghasemi, D.D.S. '24, and Golden Age Dental Care's Dr. Robert Khzouz and dental assistant Ashley Montes are off to their next patient care site in Orange County (top), while the Community-Based Clinical Education team of (l-r) Rose Malki '24, incoming D.D.S. '28, Dr. Steve Lee, D.D.S. '94, Dr Kelly Vitzthum, D.D.S. '20, and Rebecca Rashti '22 coordinates the MINDFUL Project from Westwood. Not pictured: CBCE administrative analyst Kyle Tupaz.



"UCLA Dentistry's MINDFUL Project plays an integral role in confronting and transforming the public health crisis that prevents older adults from getting the oral health care that everyone deserves," said Kenzie Ferguson, vice president of Foundation and Corporate Social Responsibility for Delta Dental of California and affiliates. "This project is part of our organization's commitment to the health of our nation's older adults and delivering on our purpose to improve health by providing access to quality care."

"Delta Dental has been incredibly generous and supportive of our vision. [It] recognizes the role schools play in changing how dentistry is practiced. The grant will also help fund the development of new resources for existing dentists and needed research," added Dr. Vitzthum, who noted that pre- and post-rotation assessment data is being collected to see how it affects students' perceptions of care for nursing home populations.

The MINDFUL Project operates as part of the CBCE program, which Dr. Vitzthum directs. Launched in March of 2018, CBCE requires fourth-year dental students to complete at least six weeks of rotations in external clinical settings. Affiliates include federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), private practices, and corporate dentistry practices, all serving vulnerable populations.

The program has provided more than 67,000 dental procedures to approximately 28,000 patients in underserved communities, with practice sites throughout California, and as far afield as Michigan.

"Students get comfortable and see themselves practicing in these areas. It's somewhat of a workforce solution and a pipeline of dental graduates

"This project is part of our organization's commitment to the health of our nation's older adults and delivering on our purpose to improve health by providing access to quality care."

– Kenzie Ferguson, vice president of Foundation and Corporate Social Responsibility for Delta Dental of California and affiliates

to these settings,” explained Dr. Vitzthum, who notes that one FQHC site is directed by a School of Dentistry graduate who had participated in CBCE herself.

Chapman’s three-week MINDFUL rotation took her from Westwood to long-term care and nursing facilities in Orange County, where she met each morning with supervising dentist Dr. Robert Khzouz and his assistant to review the day’s cases.

“Dr. Khzouz emphasized that we would be caring for patients who might not receive regular care and that we were often their only source of dental care. He prepared me for seeing more complex cases and for building a rapport with patients who might be resistant to care.”

In a stark departure from the School’s Westwood clinic, Chapman’s rotation involved performing exams on bed-bound patients or those sitting in a wheelchair. The appointments included a clinical exam with periodontal probing as well as cleanings and scaling procedures. She performed extractions and made impressions for dentures. She also removed tori, bony growths that develop in the lower jaw and can interfere with placing dentures.

“It’s impressive to have everything you need to perform these procedures without the equipment connected to a dental chair,” says Chapman. Instead, drills, air and water syringes, and other equipment come on a rollable cart.

At the end of each day, which can include visits to multiple facilities, she debriefed with Dr. Khzouz. This also involved paper charting, which she had not done before, and writing out prescriptions.

Chapman’s patients included those with physical disabilities as well as cognitive illnesses such as dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. Some were wary and confused.

“I had a few opportunities to work with patients unwilling to receive treatment,” she recalled. “After I explained it to them, some would then allow us to take care of them. That was a learning experience for patient care and patient relations, especially with the added complexity of mental and cognitive disabilities.”



Lauren Chapman, D.D.S. '24, reviews a dental treatment plan with a long-term care facility resident.

Dr. Khzouz says dentists who work with these populations need to have compassion and a sensitive bedside manner. “They need to look at the patient as a whole. Their treatment plan will be informed by much more than what they see visually, including the patient’s health history, co-morbidities, and cognition.”

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 23

One Final *Send-Off*

Recent Faculty Retirements



Earl Freymiller, D.M.D., M.D.
34 Years of Service

Dr. Earl Freymiller, holder of the Bob and Marion Wilson Endowed Chair, retired in June 2023 as chair of the Division of Diagnostic and Surgical Sciences and director of the Postgraduate Training Program in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. After training at Harvard School of Dental Medicine and Harvard Medical School, and gaining a medical board OMFS certification, Dr. Freymiller joined the School of Dentistry faculty in 1989. In addition to his pre- and postdoctoral teaching responsibilities, he contributed to more than 45 peer-reviewed journal articles. The use of platelet-rich plasma to improve the success of bone grafting was among his focus areas.

In 2013, Dr. Freymiller became the first UCLA recipient of the California Dental Association Foundation's Dr. Arthur A. Dugoni Faculty Award, recognizing educators affiliated with the state's seven dental schools for exceptional leadership, innovation, collaboration, compassion, philanthropic spirit, and integrity. He was also recognized on numerous occasions for leading UCLA's OMFS residents to Ensenada, Mexico, four times per year to perform complicated cleft lip and palate surgeries on children, an initiative he started in 1990 with partner Thousand Smiles Foundation.



Daniela Silva, D.D.S., M.S.
12 Years of Service

Dr. Daniela Rodrigues Silva served as director of the Pediatric Dentistry Residency Program while holding the Dr. Thomas K. Barber Endowed Term Chair until her retirement in October 2023.

After completing dental education, training, and running a private practice clinic in Goiânia, Brazil, Dr. Silva moved to Florida in 2004 to serve as residency program director for two clinics affiliated with the University of Florida College of Dentistry, moving on to Westwood in 2011. Dr. Silva received several accolades throughout her career, which was highlighted by her being named a fellow by the American College of Dentists in 2018. Also a diplomate of the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry, she published research papers related to cariology, restorative dentistry, pulp therapy, and dental trauma. Featured in a January 2020 UCLA Magazine story on the university's "problem solvers," Dr. Silva stated: "My dream is to stop caries disease from happening to little ones."



Bill Piskorowski, D.D.S.
Six Years of Service

Dr. Bill Piskorowski's left his mark on the School of Dentistry as the inaugural Associate Dean for Community-Based Clinical Education (CBCE), a program he launched in 2017 with support from Dean Paul Krebsbach.

With a mission of enhancing students' education while increasing access to care for vulnerable populations through sustainable community service, Dr. Piskorowski implemented CBCE as a pilot program in March 2018 with a select group of D.D.S. candidates completing a two-week community rotation. Now, current fourth-year dental students each complete at least six weeks of rotations with two different practice models. Approximately 28,000 patients in underserved communities have received over 67,000 dental procedures through CBCE.

Following a 25-year career in private practice, Dr. Piskorowski joined the University of Michigan School of Dentistry in 2006 as director of outreach and community affairs. While in Ann

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 23

Staff Retirements

Walter Amaya

Endodontics Clinic Supervisor

Nuria Beekford

Faculty Group Dental Practice Registered Dental Assistant

Connie Daino

Orthodontics Patient and Account Coordinator

Martha Noble

Faculty Group Dental Practice Registered Dental Assistant

Wonder Women: From the Margins to the Majority | continued from page 9

had a number of women among my pre-clinical instructors. They always made it seem —not easy — but very manageable to do what they do, to have a family, and be able to excel in this profession.”

This mother-daughter team has some synergies in their School of Dentistry experience, each serving a term as president of UCLA’s chapter of the Student National Dental Association. The organization was founded in 1972 to support the success of minority dental students. The opportunities to network and just find mentors were important to both while at UCLA.

On June 2, their respective experiences will converge at the Class of 2024 Commencement Ceremony in Royce Hall. In a longstanding School tradition, alumni family members are invited to participate in the doctoral hooding ceremony.

“To me, it feels like the perfect full-circle moment,” Jordan said. “I got to grow up watching my mom in this profession, not realizing it was the profession I would one day be a part of. And while getting into dental school was this amazing accomplishment, I’m going to graduate from UCLA SOD just like her!

“I didn’t choose the school because of that but because it felt like the place I was also meant to be,” Jordan added. “It is just so special. Because I chose the same school, she gets to hood me and seal in this generational love of dentistry. I’m definitely going to cry.”

One Final Send-Off Recent Faculty Retirements | continued from page 22

Arbor he piloted the of a one-of-a-kind, financially self-sustaining CBCE model. Among numerous career honors, in 2013 he received ADEA’s prestigious William J. Gies Award for Outstanding Innovation by a Dental Educator.

Test Your Knowledge Answer Key

1. b 2. b 3. b 4. c 5. f 6. a 7. a 8. b 9. d 10. b

A MINDFUL Approach to Compassionate Community Care | continued from page 21

He stresses to students the importance of checking geriatric and disabled patients for pain, swallowing disorders, and other factors that might interfere with their ability to eat. He also emphasizes how poor oral health can contribute to or worsen systemic diseases.

Ghasemi noted the need to adapt to the unique setting and population.

“Many of the treatments we do at School are very comprehensive. We have all the radiographs in the world, all the different specialties,” she says. “The treatment plans in a retirement care setting are very different. We’re looking at things like whether the patient is in pain, whether they have an active infection that’s bothering them. These patients have acute heart failure. They just had a stroke. They’re taking 10 different blood thinners. Our treatments have to take that into consideration.”

“This rotation definitely prepares students to provide special patient care and treatment for the geriatric population, but it also shows us how far dentistry can reach beyond a typical dental clinic.”
– Lauren Chapman, D.D.S. ‘24

Dr. Khzouz observed students’ skill sets subtly grow throughout their rotations. “They gained a lightness and comfort working with these patients,” he said. “When I asked if they saw this as a potential part of their future clinical practice, most said they did.”

Even after only two sessions (which involved doing anterior composite restorations and extractions) Ghasemi said she would feel comfortable working with this population at some point in the future.

Chapman, the Class of 2024 president and a U.S. Navy veteran, concurred: “I feel grateful to have had this experience and move forward into residency, having provided bedside dentistry and having worked with patients with complex health, dental and cognitive needs. I think it has made me a better provider who can provide care for a wider population. This rotation definitely prepares students to provide special patient care and treatment for the geriatric population, but it also shows us how far dentistry can reach beyond a typical dental clinic.”

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June 1

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June 7

Guided Bone Regeneration (GBR)

June 15

Soft Tissue Grafting Workshop for Functional and Esthetic Needs Periodontics

Starts June 24

Hawaii Symposium 2024 - Turtle Bay Resort

August 17

Resilience in Dentistry

Starts October 3

Endodontic Continuum

October 12

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Start October 18

Psychological Management of the Orofacial Pain Patient

October 19

State of the Art Restorative Dentistry

November 2

Re-Certification in Pediatric Oral Sedation

November 16

Preservation of Alveolar Bone Dimensions in Extraction Sockets



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