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— DR. BEVERLEY CRAWFORD

INSPIRING CITY'S YOUTH

PENN DENTAL MEDICINE PARTNERS WITH ORAL HEALTH ACADEMY FOR PHILADELPHIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

WHEN ALUMNA Dr. Rayna Strong (D'13) was a student at Penn Dental Medicine, she served as minority recruitment coordinator for the Student National Dental Association. As a minority student from a disadvantaged background who had to work fiercely throughout her schooling to earn her place in a prestigious dental program, Dr. Strong was committed to helping those from similar circumstances have an easier path to success — both in dentistry and life.



Around the same time, across the Schuylkill River in North Philadelphia, Estreanna Green enrolled in the city's A. Philip Randolph Career and Technical High School, at first interested in culinary arts, but switching by 10th grade into the school's dental assisting program because she thought it would provide more opportunities for her future.

That year, when Dr. Strong was a senior at Penn Dental Medicine and Estreanna a sophomore at Randolph, their paths — and dreams — crossed. With leadership from both institutions, the School District of Philadelphia's Oral Health Academy at Penn Dental Medicine was initiated to provide much-needed resources, including equipment, academic programming, expertise, and mentors, for the high school dental assisting program.

OPPOSITE: Charlene Jennings Fenster (DH'75), left, the Dental Assisting Instructor at Randolph Career and Technical High School, in her classroom with Dr. Beverley Crawford, right, Director of Diversity Affairs; Bianca Williams (D'17), center back; and Randolph student Estreanna Green, center, front.

Charlene Jennings Fenster, BSDH, MA, PHDHP, a 1975 alumna of Penn Dental Medicine's former dental hygiene program and now Dental Assisting Instructor at Randolph, had reached out to her alma mater to help fill some significant gaps in the dental assisting program.

Dr. Beverley Crawford, DDS, Assistant Professor of Clinical Dentistry and Director of Diversity Affairs for Penn Dental Medicine, recognized an opportunity at Randolph to encourage and support student success in a relevant high school program and potentially increase the pipeline of underrepresented minority students in dentistry.

And Dr. Strong helped to initiate programs and opportunities in the partnership's first year for her Community Health Honors project, including setting up an annual shadowing day at Penn Dental Medicine and expanding the Diversity Office's Impressions program, a Student National Dental Association-led, one-day series of workshops and lectures aimed at educating undergraduate students about careers in dentistry, to include the Randolph students.

"One of the best things this program does is expose the Randolph students to the possibility of becoming dentists and lets them know there are students with similar backgrounds at Penn Dental Medicine," Dr. Crawford says.



INSTRUCTION, HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

The Oral Health Academy at Penn Dental Medicine offers both academic and hands-on experiential opportunities for qualified minority students in Randolph's dental assisting program. The Randolph seniors take a radiology course, co-developed by Dr. Mel Mupparapu (D'96), Professor of Oral Medicine, Director of the Division of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology and Director of Faculty Advancement and Diversity, and Fenster, to complement and enrich the high school curriculum. On site at Penn Dental Medicine's Oral Diagnosis Clinic, the Randolph students learn all aspects of current radiology techniques, and have access to

state-of-the-art equipment and resources, as well as instruction and support from dental faculty and students.

The radiology experience is particularly important, Fenster notes, since one of the "brass rings" for Randolph dental assisting students is passing the national radiology exam and earning a Pennsylvania dental x-ray license.

The Randolph juniors, meanwhile, take a hands-on laboratory procedures course at Penn Dental Medicine, allowing them to make alginate impressions of Dentoforms, pour stone models, and fabricate custom trays and acrylic temporary restorations on Dentoform teeth. They are taught and graded with the help of dental students.

In addition to the course content and access to sophisticated equipment, the opportunity to interact with faculty and dental students "provides a reality-based translation of their high school vocational program to a professional career that is economically viable and intellectually gratifying," according to the Office of Diversity Affairs.

Estreanna Green has benefited from many opportunities through the Oral Health Academy partnership, which have not only helped her be successful in school but also to formulate plans for her future, which include earning a four-year college degree and attending dental school with the goal of becoming an oral pathologist.

The summer before her junior year, she was selected to participate in the Summer Mentorship Program at Penn Dental Medicine, part of a University initiative funded by the Office of the Provost that also places students in Penn Nursing, Penn Engineering, Penn Law, and the Perelman School of Medicine.

The month-long immersion mentorship experience for about 50 Philadelphia public and charter high school students (10 at Penn Dental Medicine) provides classroom instruction, one-on-one sessions with professors, tours of labs and other facilities, as well as SAT preparation, writing workshops, and information on college financial planning.

AN EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE

"I learned a lot about different aspects of dentistry, orthodontics, and prosthodontics; it was eye-opening for me," she said. "There were lectures by professors, we went into clinics and labs, and got insight into what goes on in each department."

And this past summer, heading into her senior year, Estreanna arranged to shadow Dr. Mupparapu, who designed an individualized curriculum for her specific interests and goals.

Following Dr. Strong's initial efforts, Dr. Eliza Callwood (D'15) and Bianca Williams (D'17) also stepped in to support the Oral Health Academy through the Community Health Honors program. This year, Williams' goal is to enhance the program's biology component and provide additional mentorship opportunities for dental students at Randolph.

Williams, who says she knew when she entered dental school that she wanted to dedicate a significant amount of time to serving the community, said one of the most rewarding experiences at Randolph was helping to prepare last year's seniors for the national written and performance dental assisting occupational exams.

"The Randolph students truly seemed to learn a lot from gaining hands-on assisting experience and having the opportunity to ask questions as we worked," Williams says.

For Dr. Strong, who also earned her master's in bioethics at Penn, helping the younger generation of students such as Estreanna is imperative. As lead dental provider at Family Health Centers in Brewster, Washington, she serves a population that is about 80 percent Hispanic, many of them migrant farm workers and their families.

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION

"I wanted to really empower kids who were just starting to dream big to be able to achieve their dreams," she says. "It takes a lot to step out of your comfort zone and see yourself in a position that is unfamiliar and unrealistic to your own family and peers."

Other Penn Dental Medicine students contribute to the Oral Health Academy in different ways. Some spent several days at Randolph preparing students for the Dental Assisting National Board exam on radiation,

health and safety, while others have presented workshops on SAT preparation and choosing a college. The high school students periodically accompany the Penn Dental Medicine students on community volunteer opportunities.

"Many of our students bring their talents to the program," Dr. Crawford says. In addition, many Penn Dental Medicine students have donated instruments and supplies they no longer need to support the high school program.

While it will take some time to assess how many students in Randolph's dental assisting program eventually enroll in dental school, including at Penn Dental Medicine, Fenster says the value of the Oral Health Academy partnership already is clear for the Randolph students.

Of the three classes completing the program so far — 2013, 2014 and 2015 — all of the dental assisting students have graduated from high school and 94 percent have enrolled in college and are still matriculated, Fenster says.

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— BIANCA WILLIAMS, D'17

BUILDING DIVERSITY RESOURCES

Penn Dental Medicine is actively working to build its resources for scholarships and the pipeline programs within the School's Office of Diversity that are encouraging underrepresented minority students to consider a career in dental medicine. To learn more about how to support these initiatives, contact Maren Gaughan, Associate Dean for Leadership Giving, 215-898-8952, gaughan@dental.upenn.edu.

In addition, every senior who qualified to test during those three years has passed the national radiology exam and earned their Pennsylvania dental x-ray license.

Although her office more typically works to cultivate undergraduate students, Dr. Crawford says starting earlier gives the students a better chance of setting goals and succeeding. "Estreanna wants to be a pathologist, and I don't know if she would have considered this if she had not been exposed to the research and clinical opportunities at Penn Dental Medicine, and had such a champion as Ms. Fenster and mentor as Bianca Williams," she says.

At the same time, Dr. Crawford adds, "We want to achieve the goal of 100 percent student enrollment at a four-year university and an end result of the choice of dentistry as a profession. One of the best things this program does is expose students to that possibility." ■

— By Debbie Goldberg

OPPOSITE TOP: On a visit to the Randolph High School, Dr. Beverley Crawford talks with a student about dental career options.

OPPOSITE LOWER: Charlene Jennings Fenster (DH'75) working with students in the dental assisting classroom at Randolph.

LEFT: Bianca Williams (D'17) instructing Randolph students on taking an impression; she is working with them for her Community Health Honors project.

