

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS

PROFILES, GATHERINGS & ENGAGEMENT



Alumni profile: Scott De Rossi, D'95, GD'97 *A new Dean draws on lessons learned at Penn Dental Medicine*

FOR ALUMNUS DR. SCOTT De Rossi, D'95, GD'97, a former Penn Dental Medicine faculty member and administrator, lessons about oral medicine and interpersonal relationships learned while a student here have been key to an illustrious career path leading to the Deanship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Dentistry.

Dr. De Rossi was born and raised in Acushnet, Mass., the son of public educators who exemplified the value and rewards of a career in teaching. As a student at Providence College in Rhode Island, he met a retired oral surgeon who introduced him to the concepts of oral medicine. Recognizing both education and oral medicine as disciplines he wanted to pursue, he applied to the School of Dental Medicine, where he earned a DMD in 1995 and completed his oral medicine residency in 1997.

"I chose Penn because it is the preeminent oral medicine program in the world," he says. "I knew a degree from Penn Dental Medicine would provide me with the skills

and knowledge to be successful. It's a place that focuses not just on educating dentists, but on educating the field's future leaders."

While a student here, Dr. De Rossi was one of four in his class selected for the hospital track program, through which he interacted with students and faculty at the Medical College of Pennsylvania (now Drexel University School of Medicine), gaining medical perspectives that helped to shape his philosophy on the role of oral medicine in health.

"The word 'dentist,' when translated from French, essentially means 'toothist,'" he says. "But dentists are so much more than that. Oral health professionals feel an obligation to focus far beyond the mouth and teeth alone — we are physicians of the entire oral and maxillofacial region. In oral medicine, we explore the interface between medicine and dentistry and its crucial role in overall health."

ROLE MODELS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

As a student and a resident, Dr. De Rossi was particularly influenced by faculty members Dr. Michael Glick, GD'88, (now, Professor of Oral Diagnostic Sciences at University of Buffalo School of Dental Medicine), Dr. Thomas Sollecito, D'89, GD'91, (presently, Professor and Chair of Oral Medicine at Penn Dental Medicine), and Dr. Martin Greenberg, D'68, (now, Professor Emeritus of Oral Medicine). "These men were instrumental in shaping my career," he says. "They were role models in the importance of lifelong learning and continual improvement to a successful career in dentistry."

After completing his residency, Dr. De Rossi spent a year at the School's faculty practice as a staff dentist, then joined the faculty of the Department of Oral Medicine, where he was Assistant Professor of Oral Medicine until 2007. During his years at Penn Dental Medicine, he also held important administrative roles, including Director of the Oral Medicine Residency Program, Director of the Division of Graduate Dental Education, Assistant Dean of Admissions, and Chair of the Faculty Senate.

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— SCOTT DE ROSSI (D'95, GD'97)
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In 2007, Dr. De Rossi left Penn for a position at Augusta University in Georgia, where he chaired a new department at the dental school — Oral Health and Diagnostic Sciences. “It was an opportunity to build a department from the ground up, shaping the programs and curriculum with the knowledge I had gained at Penn,” he says. While at Augusta University, he became Director of the Section of Oral Medicine and the Clinical Center for Oral Medicine, as well as Vice-chair elect of the Faculty Senate.

AT UNC, A RICH TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

In October of 2016, Dr. De Rossi was offered the position of Dean at the University of North Carolina (UNC) School of Dentistry, a public institution that draws more than 80 percent of its students from in state. He began his post as Dean in January 2017. Since relocating to Chapel Hill, Dr. De Rossi’s family, including his wife, Katharine, D’96, GD’98, GED’98

(whom he met at Penn Dental Medicine and who now specializes in oral medicine and geriatric dentistry in UNC’s faculty practice), and their daughters (Sofia, 15, and Evie, 13) have fallen in love with the area — and the school.

“UNC has a rich tradition of excellence,” he says, “The School of Dentistry is integrated into a top-tier university, and draws hard-working students and forward-thinking faculty. It’s a very diverse learning environment with an amazing network of influential, engaged, and generous alumni.”

His favorite aspect of being Dean, he says, is interacting with the warm and talented people he encounters each day, from staff to students to faculty, all of whom help make the school a special place.

A MODEL FOR A SUCCESSFUL DEANSHIP

“Part of who I am and how I see my role as Dean was shaped by Raymond Fonseca, the Dean of Penn Dental throughout my years

as a student and a faculty member there,” he says. “Dean Fonseca created an open and friendly culture in which he had a personal relationship with his students as well as his faculty.”

Using his former dean as a model, Dr. De Rossi is already working toward his goals: to build an atmosphere of transparency, collaboration, and trust; to increase faculty development and recruiting of excellent faculty; to revolutionize the curriculum; and to create new high-impact programs. In achieving these goals, he aims to make UNC School of Dentistry one of the preeminent dental schools in the world.

“I am here to make a difference in the way dentistry is practiced, and to transform dentistry for better health,” he says. ■



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