

As the new Chief of the Division of Community Oral Health, Dr. Andres Pinto hopes to inspire public service among students, while continuing to build the School's presence in the community.

CONNECTING TO THE COMMUNITY

DR. ANDRES PINTO (D'99, GD'01, GR'07, GR'12, M'12) has an abiding goal to have Penn Dental Medicine students embrace a holistic view about making an impact in the communities they will serve.

"As dentists, we need to practice public health skills in addition to clinical care skills and be key players in oral health outreach," he says.

That vision has defined Dr. Pinto since his days as a pre-doctoral and postdoctoral student at Penn and all the way through his 10 years as a member of the School's faculty. So it was a natural match when Penn Dental Medicine selected him to take on the post of Chief of the Division of Community Oral Health this past summer.

Effective July 2011, this new position added to a long list of roles: Associate Professor of Oral Medicine; Director of Oral Medicine Services and Medically Complex Patient Care; clinician within the Penn Dental Faculty Practices; and an active member of an intramural practice in oral medicine and dental care for medically complex patients.

"Although the position represents a major addition to my current duties, it is a good fit with my interest in public health," he says.

A FORERUNNER IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Dr. Pinto was the first dentist to train in Penn's Master of Public Health program, earning his degree in 2007. During that time, he developed a strong interest in health disparity research and policy, particularly oral-medical disparities and access-to-care issues in minority populations. That interest continues to inform his activities now as Division Chief, a position he considers a calling to help remedy the disparities in medical and dental care affecting those in greatest need in Philadelphia.

"Our Division is strong and offers formidable prospects to increase our presence in the community and beyond," he says. "Our goal is to integrate the science of dentistry with the practice of public health to prevent oral disease and promote better overall health."

Key to Dr. Pinto's decision to take on the new role was the opportunity to work with seasoned public health practitioners. He believes the best ways to define, assess, and resolve public health problems is to draw on the knowledge and skills of practitioners in a variety of disciplines.

"I am fortunate to have key collaborators on our team, including Dr. Robert Collins [Director of the Office of International Relations], Dr. Joan Gluch [Director of Community Oral Health and Associate Dean for Academic Policy], and a group of superb certified public health hygienists," says Dr. Pinto. "Equally important are the collaborative relations we have across campus, all of which were instrumental in my decision to commit to this position."



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SERVING A LARGE COMMUNITY

The central focus of the Division of Community Oral Health is the School's academically based service-learning programs, which take students and faculty into the community through a wealth of service and educational opportunities. Each year on average, students and faculty provide oral health education, screening, preventive and clinical dental services and referrals to more than 14,000 individuals. Dr. Pinto notes that the growth and success of these programs is based upon strong collaboration between the University and community-based partners in West and Southwest Philadelphia, and he is committed to continuing to build upon this model going forward.

“By working with community partners, such as the School District of Philadelphia, to establish ongoing programs or with agencies that have existing service programs where oral health education and services can be readily implemented, we are able to provide a consistent oral health presence for the audiences served,” says Dr. Pinto. “In this way, our service programs are a sustainable means of increasing access to care, while providing our students with diverse experiences.”

In addition to working with the School District, where students and faculty provide screenings and dental sealants in the classroom and clinical care aboard the PennSmiles mobile clinic, the Division partners with community-based clinics in West Philadelphia, where students provide care to

the elderly as part of Penn Nursing's LIFE Center; and to residents of all ages within Sayre Health Center, a new site that opened since Dr. Pinto's appointment (see story, page 2). The Division's service-learning programs also include partnerships with five University-based interdisciplinary care clinics where Penn Dental Medicine students and faculty work in collaboration with Penn medical, nursing, and social work students to provide oral health education, dental screenings, and referrals for dental care.

Outreach aside, Dr. Pinto also believes the service-learning aspect of the School's curriculum provides valuable benefits to dental students. “We provide students with a different view of how a dentist can impact his or her community,” he says. “I believe this exposure makes them better dentists.”

FOCUSING ON RESEARCH

In addition to serving the community, Dr. Pinto is equally dedicated to forwarding research initiatives that will help transform knowledge into improved ways of diagnosing, treating, and preventing disease. He believes the School is strongly positioned to meet that need and is taking up that task within his Division.

"We are one of two local dental schools with epidemiologic data on the oral health of children and young adults in Philadelphia," he says. "By establishing the epidemiologic profile of oral disease in the population we serve, we can illustrate local oral health disparities." Armed with that data, he feels confident in approaching community, local, and federal organizations to ask for support in expanding the sealant and screening programs in Philadelphia.

Looking ahead, he hopes that data will also help him secure funding necessary to bringing more services to the community. "Preliminary data can be used to apply for funding from private and public sources to enhance our programs," he says. "One initiative we would like to develop is a dental public health residency, which could in turn, increase the number of dental public health practitioners in our area."

Dr. Pinto envisions the residency program as a way to develop a cadre of practitioners who can serve the oral health needs of a larger population. "Part of Penn's goal is to train professionals who are conscious of the challenges of access to care that a big segment of the population faces," he says. "This residency program would allow us to provide more care to more people."

As Dr. Pinto works on building research activities within the Division, it is helping to increase the scholarly yield as well — another of his goals. Talking to him in February, he notes, "This academic year, we have already submitted five abstracts to several scientific meetings, including the

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International Association for Dental Research, and are in the process of finalizing three manuscripts based on some of the research we have done with the information gathered by our services over the last seven years."

Of course, program expansion to educate even more of the community about the importance of oral health to total wellbeing is also on Dr. Pinto's list.

"We are currently exploring the feasibility of implementing oral care and screening in primary care medical and nursing practices in coordination with the Penn's schools of Nursing and Medicine," he adds. "We are also keen on implementing evaluation of our interventions in the community, both from a community-based perspective and via assessment of our impact on the incidence of caries, periodontal disease, and referrals for emergency care in West Philadelphia." **PDJ**

—Amy Biemiller

ANDRES PINTO, DMD, MPH, FDS, RCSED

*Associate Professor of Oral Medicine
and Community Oral Health*

Director of Oral Medicine Services

*Chief, Division of Community
Oral Health*

EDUCATION

- MS, Clinical Epidemiology, University of Pennsylvania, 2012
- MPH, University of Pennsylvania, 2007
- Certificate, Clinical Research, University of Pennsylvania, 2005
- Certificate, Oral Medicine, Penn Dental Medicine, 2001
- DMD, Penn Dental Medicine, 1999
- DDS, Universidad Javeriana (Bogota, Colombia), 1995

HONORS/CREDENTIALS

- Fellow in Dental Surgery (Oral Med), Royal College of Surgeons (Edinburgh), 2011
- Selected as Evidence-Based Reviewer, American Dental Association, 2008
- Recipient of the American Dental Education Association's Junior Faculty Award, 2005
- Selected for the American Dental Association's Institute for Leadership, 2004
- Recipient of the Provost Faculty Award by the University of Pennsylvania, 2005
- Diplomate, American Board of Oral Medicine, 2004
- Fellow, American Association of Hospital Dentists, 2003

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Prevalence of overweight and oral health considerations in children with cardiovascular disease
- Outcome assessment in orofacial pain, including the epidemiology of orofacial pain in children and adolescents
- Pain processing and perception in children and adolescents, in particular the affect of perceived pain experiences on attitudes toward dental treatment