

A MULTIFACETED CLINICAL LEADER

NEW ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR CLINICAL AFFAIRS DR. NAJEED SALEH (D'94) BRINGS YEARS OF PRACTICE AND RESEARCH EXPERIENCE — AND A LIFELONG LOVE OF TEACHING — TO THE CLINICAL TABLE

OPPOSITE: Dr. Najeed Saleh (D'94) recently took on the new role of Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs.

DR. NAJEED SALEH, a respected member of Penn Dental Medicine's faculty for more than a quarter century, has been named Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs, bringing years of invaluable experience in dentistry, particularly his specialty of prosthodontics, to the education, training, and growth of Penn Dental Medicine students. As of March 1, Dr. Saleh, who previously ran the restorative clinics as Director of Comprehensive Care Clinics, now oversees all operational aspects of the School's restorative, pediatric, periodontal, oral medicine, oral surgery, endodontic, and orthodontic clinics. It is a complex, interdisciplinary position well suited to his comprehensive background in dentistry.



AN EARLY APPRECIATION FOR DENTAL ARTISTRY

Dr. Saleh's journey as a dentist began in Israel, where he was born, and, at age 18, enrolled in the dental education program at Hebrew University. "I was always interested in contributing to the well-being and health of others," he remembers. A strong science student, he chose dentistry because of a fascination with the technical skills and artistry it required. He earned his DMD and then a certificate in Prosthodontics and was named a Diplomate on the Israeli Board of Prosthodontics.

With his career in full swing, and after two years as a Research Fellow at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, Dr. Saleh took a sabbatical to the United States in 1990. The Hebrew University School of Dental Medicine has a long history of faculty and ideas exchanges with Penn Dental Medicine, and Dr. Saleh was excited to observe the clinical process and discuss mutual interests with the clinical teams here at Penn. Dr. Saleh joined the School's faculty in 1990 as a visiting assistant professor and after experiencing Penn Dental Medicine's



research, clinical, and educational climate, he made an important decision: he would become licensed to practice in the U.S. through Penn Dental Medicine's Program for Advanced Standing Students (PASS, see related story, page 18) and continue his career in America. He earned his DMD through PASS in 1994.

DIVERSITY OFFERS UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES

Dr. Saleh appreciated the uniqueness of Penn Dental Medicine's program on that first visit and continues to do so now. Having programs in all of the dental specialties under one roof enables Penn Dental Medicine to provide comprehensive care to patients and comprehensive experience to students.

"Our students are exposed to a faculty of highly diverse backgrounds, which allows them to experience very different points of view related to patient care," he says. Through standardization of the teaching process, students are taught different approaches, while maintaining the highest standards and quality of care.

Dr. Saleh also values the perspective and experience that the urban demographics of University City and West Philadelphia contribute to a Penn Dental Medicine education. "Our students have the opportunity to work with a diverse patient population relative to many parameters — race, ethnicity, economics, and various levels of medical and dental complexity," says Dr. Saleh. "Our unique situation here also allows us to provide dental care to those who otherwise would not have access to it due to financial issues." All of these experiences, he believes, work together to make Penn Dental Medicine graduates well-rounded and compassionate.

He praises the School's community outreach program as well, noting that the Division of Community Oral Health, which oversees the PennSmiles mobile dental program and participation in West Philadelphia's Sayre Clinic (run by Penn Medicine), serves as a national model for bringing dental care to the underserved.

LONG- AND SHORT-TERM GOALS

In his new role, many of Dr. Saleh's long-term goals for the clinics include communication, standardization, and increases in patient enrollment and retention. He plans to increase regular interaction and dialogue among the clinics and departments to ensure that protocols are being followed uniformly; improve communications between dental students/faculty and patients so that the highest level of decision making can occur; and standardize the work flow related to patient care, so that every patient receives the best, most efficient care possible. Through it all, he aims to sustain the highest levels of education that have become synonymous with Penn Dental Medicine.

It's a tall order, and one he plans to tackle thoroughly and systematically. First on his agenda, however, is a short-term goal that itself offers its own challenges: implementing the transition of all seven clinics to new electronic health records (HER) software, axiUm, which will require significant training of

faculty and students. Once up and running, the new software will offer comprehensive benefits to its users.

“The software we were using previously was geared to private practice, not to dental education,” he explains. “Because axiUm is built in educational parameters related to overseeing students, it will streamline and simplify the operation of the clinics considerably.” Dr. Saleh estimates that 84% of dental schools nationwide are now using axiUm, so the transition will result in a critical technology upgrade, bringing Penn Dental Medicine in line with teaching clinics across the country. Training by the axiUm team is underway, and Dr. Saleh hopes that the new software will be up and running by fully trained faculty and students by July.



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— DR. NAJEED SALEH (D’94)

THE CHALLENGE AND COMPLEXITY OF PROSTHODONTICS

As a young dentist in Israel, Dr. Saleh was drawn to the specialty of prosthodontics because of the advanced knowledge and skill levels it required. He still enjoys the challenge of practicing prosthodontics today, seeing patients within the School’s Penn Dental Family Practice.

“The satisfaction is enormous,” he says. “Working with dentally disabled patients and restoring them to full dental function and esthetics so that they can continue with the quality of life they deserve is incredibly rewarding.”

He enjoys the interdisciplinary nature of the work as well. “The prosthodontist is often the quarterback of an interdisciplinary treatment team that can include periodontists, orthodontists, endodontists, oral surgeons, and lab technicians,” he says. “Together, they work to bring about optimal outcomes.”

The field of prosthodontics is constantly changing, he adds, with new materials, such as Zirconium oxide, and hybrid ceramics, constantly being introduced and the use of CAD/CAM technologies continually evolving. There are also new techniques being developed to apply to older materials such as alloys, and the ongoing challenge of applying new digital processes to procedures.

Dr. Saleh’s own research interests, related to clinical research and dental materials, fall right into line with the trends in prosthodontics. He is particularly interested in newer techniques for ceramic bridge restorations, including the implementation of new CAD/CAM processes involving Zirconia-based restorations.

ABOVE: Dr. Najeed Saleh discussing a case with student Jinah Kang (D’16) in the William W.M. Cheung Advanced Dental Care Clinic where he continues to teach.

A DEEP LOVE OF TEACHING

While Dr. Saleh enjoys every aspect of his new job, from the challenges of overseeing multiple clinics with varied functions, to the transition to new technology and his ongoing practice and research in prosthodontics, teaching has always held a special place in his heart, and always will. He remains on the clinical instructional faculty in the School’s William W.M. Cheung Advanced Dental Care Clinic for advanced restorative and esthetic dentistry. He is also involved in lecturing to dental students in the implant dentistry, operative dentistry, fixed prosthodontics, and introduction to clinical dentistry courses.

“It’s extremely exciting to meet new generations of students every year and be able to influence their development and transform them into professional, competent dentists,” he says.

He also values the interaction with other faculty members that comes with teaching: “Interaction with my colleagues allows us to have intellectual discussions, exchange experiences, and share knowledge.”

And finally, he enjoys the diverse population of patients he has the opportunity to meet, serve, and learn from through his students.

“I love everything about teaching,” says Dr. Saleh. “I will never give it up.” ■

— By Juliana Delany