



## Following a Passion for Patient-Centered Dentistry

As research continues to prove a link between good oral hygiene and overall health, it becomes vitally important to make dental care more accessible to all people. But what about those who have mobility issues, lack transportation, are homebound, or have physical disabilities that would make it impossible to visit a traditional dental office?

“Those are the questions that have been in my head for a long time,” says Dr. Alicia Houston (GD’15), this year’s chief resident in Penn Dental Medicine’s Oral Medicine Program.

Not content to just mull over the problem, Dr. Houston has devised post-graduation plans to trade the overhead of a traditional dental practice office for a career making house calls to underserved populations.

“A mobile practice is appealing because I’m deeply passionate about providing oral care to those who cannot otherwise access a traditional office, particularly the geriatric population and physically challenged,” explains Dr. Houston. “While many alternative care options exist for underserved populations, including home and hospice care, dental care options remain underrepresented and I hope to bridge that gap.”

Dr. Houston plans to provide comprehensive oral exams and basic dental care, including prophylaxis and periodontal treatments, simple operative procedures, basic extractions, and removable options. She was inspired by the success of Penn Dental Medicine graduate and clinical director, Dr. Alisa G. Kauffman (D’85), who has proven the viability of a mobile dental practice. “Access Home Dental, my Washington, D.C.-based mobile practice, remains in its infancy,” Houston says. “However, I hope to follow in the footsteps of Dr. Kauffman, whose mobile dental practice has already made a huge impact in both our industry as well as her community.”

Although Dr. Houston’s dream may be within reach, chances are, it would have remained undiscovered had she not participated in the Penn Dental Medicine Graduate Externship Program while she was a dental student at Howard University. The program partners with Howard University College of Dentistry in Washington, D.C., and Meharry Medical

College School of Dentistry in Nashville, Tenn., providing junior and senior dental students the opportunity to spend one week with graduate residents in Penn Dental Medicine specialty clinics.

“It was during this program that I was able to shadow many of Penn Dental’s renowned specialists in oral medicine, including Drs. Sollecito, Stoopler, and Greenberg. They all took great interest in immersing me in the field over the course of the program, which helped to solidify my decision to pursue training at Penn in oral medicine,” she says.

The externship program not only exposes dental students to opportunities in graduate dental education, but also helps meet the need for more minority care providers. “Through its annual student recruitment fair, the National Dental Association (NDA) conference continually emphasizes a necessity to elevate dental students via postgraduate training,” says Dr. Beverley Crawford, Director of Diversity Affairs, who oversees the externship program. “Our policies and procedures are designed to recruit a diverse group of students who can advance the profession, like Alicia Houston. This externship program was designed to support that initiative and Howard and Meharry are two institutions known for producing dental students of the highest caliber.”

In 2011, the pilot for the externship program hosted three students. Since then, more than 20 students have participated. “It has been exciting to see interest grow,” adds Dr. Uri Hangorsky, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, who brought the program idea to Dr. Crawford to set the program in motion. “Dr. Crawford is continuing to build the program and it is hoped that in the future affiliation agreements can be reached that will allow students to have some hands-on experiences.”

With her transition to private practice on the horizon for this spring, Dr. Houston has accomplished one additional leadership goal: being selected as chief resident in the Department of Oral Medicine.

“I was honored to be selected, and this opportunity has allowed me to identify some of my strengths and weaknesses as a leader,” she says. “I’m grateful for the lessons that I have learned in this role as well as the confidence I have developed to take my next step into my private dental practice.”

Key to that sense of confidence is her passion to increase public awareness of oral medicine as a vital component of comprehensive healthcare. "At the core of my passion for oral medicine, I hold a philosophical belief of the significance of early detection, diagnosis,

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DR. ALICIA HOUSTON, GD'15

effective management, and prevention," she says. "In addition to launching my mobile practice, I plan to offer community lectures and share insights with other health practitioners. When it comes to oral care, I believe that every individual must be well-informed and every practitioner must observe the importance of exercising a patient-centered approach."

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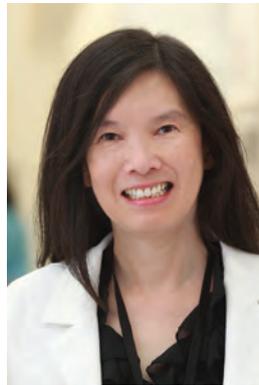
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## Encouraging Women in Leadership, Promoting Academic Careers

As part of the 2013-2014 class of the Hedwig van Ameringen Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine® (ELAM®) program, Dr. Anh Le, Chair of Penn Dental Medicine's Department of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery/Pharmacology and the Norman Vine Endowed Professor of Oral Rehabilitation, was among 50 women



Dr. Anh Le

faculty members nationwide selected to participate in this competitive program. The year-long fellowship, part of the International Center for Executive Leadership in Academics at Drexel University School of Medicine, is dedicated to preparing senior women faculty at schools of medicine, dentistry, and public health to effect sustained positive change as institutional leaders. The fellowship encompasses executive education, personal leadership assessment and coaching, and networking and mentoring activities aimed at broadening perspectives, building new capacities, and encouraging professional connections.

Dr. Le's institutional action project, developed as part of the program, examined ways to promote academic careers in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS). "On average nationwide, it is estimated that less than 2-3% of oral surgery program graduates pursue academic faculty positions," says Dr. Le. "That is a major concern. To advance our specialty, we must develop a supporting and nurturing platform that enables a successful academic path for future generations."

A preliminary survey of stakeholders, conducted as part of her project, identified the educational loan burden as well as the need for stronger faculty mentoring and improved institutional support among the top barriers to pursuing an academic career path. Among the outcomes at Penn, Dr. Le has restructured her Department to provide more opportunities for mentorship and is working with scholars from Penn Medicine, Penn Nursing, and Penn Vet to discuss strategies and best practices to promote and sustain academic clinicians overall.

In addition, as part of this project, Dr. Le recently received a \$10,000 grant from the Excellence through Diversity Fund (within Penn's Office of the Provost) in support of a proposal on "Promoting Academic Excellence through Diversity," a joint collaboration with Dr. Sarah Millar, Professor of Dermatology at Penn's Perelman School of Medicine, who also participated in the ELAM program this past year.

ELAM graduates now number nearly 900 women in leadership roles at schools nationwide. Since the program's inception in 1995, 63% of accredited U.S. dental schools and 88% of accredited U.S. medical schools have sponsored fellows.