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WHEN DR. YOTA STATHOPOULOU, DDS, MS, PhD, left her native Greece to join Penn Dental Medicine in July 2012, it was to take the position of Director of Predoctoral Periodontics and Assistant Professor, Department of Periodontics.

As if getting acclimated to Penn Dental Medicine and meeting the demands of that position weren't enough, Dr. Stathopoulou this summer was tapped to fill another role—as Assistant Dean for Clinical Affairs.

Although the two positions have distinct responsibilities, they also have some things in common. As Director of Predoctoral Periodontics, Dr. Stathopoulou has been responsible for predoctoral teaching and patient care in periodontics, and now as Assistant Dean for Clinical Affairs she is responsible for over-

affecting such things as scheduling, infection control, emergency response, and quality assurance procedures. Her overarching role is to “work with faculty, students, and staff to help provide excellent patient and student clinical experiences,” she says.

“These things are under continuous review at all times, however, with the upcoming accreditation next year, it is a good opportunity to more intently revisit policies and make sure they are up to date and things are running smoothly and efficiently.”

In her role as Director of Predoctoral Periodontics, Dr. Stathopoulou oversees all didactic courses in periodontics throughout the predoctoral curriculum, as well as the predoctoral instruction in the periodontal clinic. In addition, as Assistant Professor in the

# FURTHERING PERIODONTICS TEACHING & CLINICAL EXPERIENCES

## YOTA STATHOPOULOU, DDS, MS, PHD

OPPOSITE: Since joining the School's faculty in July 2012 as Assistant Professor, Department of Periodontics, Dr. Yota Stathopoulou has served as Director of Predoctoral Periodontics and now she is taking on a new role as Assistant Dean for Clinical Affairs.

seeing operations of and establishing general policies for all the School's clinics.

“The clinical and communicational roles of these two positions are similar in concept, however, they differ vastly in extent and complexity,” Dr. Stathopoulou says. “By doing one job, however, I can be prepared for the other and have a good view of what needs to be done.”

While both positions are challenging, she says, “At the moment, I'm spending more time as assistant dean, because it's a new position for me and didactic periodontal courses are not as busy this time of year.” She will continue in both roles for now, though with the level of responsibility of this newest appointment, she will be transitioning out of the predoctoral periodontics position.

In this new role since August 1, she has responsibility for overseeing operations of both predoctoral and postdoctoral clinics, including the review and revision of policies

Department of Periodontics, she teaches both predoctoral and postdoctoral students in the classroom and the clinic and works closely with other clinic and course directors, participating in interdisciplinary educational offerings.

Dr. Stathopoulou “is very good at what she does,” said Dr. Joseph Fiorellini, DMD, DMSc, Chair and Professor, Department of Periodontics, and Director, Postdoctoral Periodontic Program. “She's well trained in research, and clinically, she's board certified and she has experience in private practice. She fully understands both the educational and clinical training aspects of her position.”

In her first year at Penn Dental Medicine, she helped revise the curriculum and clinical teaching in periodontics and ensure the smooth operation of the periodontics clinic. In her newer role, she will focus on improving patient flow, operational efficiency, renovation of facilities, and marketing strategies for all dental clinics.

## PERIO TEACHING/CLINICAL EXPERIENCES

One significant curricular change she helped implement this past year gives pre-doctoral students more hands-on experience earlier in their training by providing the opportunity to work in the periodontal clinic during their sophomore year. Previously, the students started their clinical training in their junior year.

"This change was made to better prepare students for the clinical experience," Dr. Stathopoulou says. "Now they get into the clinic earlier working with simple periodontal cases, such as regular exams, prophylaxis and scaling, under very close—almost one-to-one—supervision."

Based on evaluations and feedback so far, Dr. Stathopoulou says the change has been successful. "The students enjoyed the course, they thought it was meaningful," she says. "When they get in the clinic now in their junior year, they are much more comfortable treating patients."



Fadi Raffoul (D'15), a junior and Class of 2015 President, was pleased to have his first clinical periodontal experience last year as part of Dr. Stathopoulou's sophomore-level course.

"Many students are eager to start treating patients, as this is the ultimate goal for most of us," he said. "Applying our learning in the clinic as early as possible enriches the educational experience. It helps us better understand the material presented in lectures, so we can expand on that knowledge during future years."

In addition, he notes, "This early interaction helped alleviate the nervousness associated with treating my first patient."

### **DRAWN BY STRONG RESEARCH, CLINIC ENVIRONMENT**

While her plate is pretty full serving in two major roles at Penn Dental Medicine, Dr. Stathopoulou is doing exactly what she had hoped when she left private practice in Athens last year to join Penn.

After earning her DDS at the National and Capodistrian University of Athens, Dr. Stathopoulou headed to the University of Louisville to bolster her dental training, earning an MS and PhD in Microbiology and Immunology and Certificate in Periodontics. In 2008, she returned to Greece to work in a private practice, while also working part-time at her alma mater, the University of Athens School of Dentistry.

She was concerned, however, that she wouldn't have as much opportunity as she would like to both practice dentistry and do clinical research in an academic environment in her home country. So when the position of Director of Predoctoral Periodontics became available at Penn Dental Medicine, she knew it would be a welcome fit for her career goals and talents.

"Penn Dental Medicine is a school with a great history and tradition in the field of periodontology," Dr. Stathopoulou says. "Furthermore, under the current leadership, there are unique opportunities for research, academic excellence, and clinical education. It was a great honor for me to be offered a position from which I can contribute to the success of this great school."

In addition to her administrative, teaching, and clinical roles, Dr. Stathopoulou is working on several research projects that reflect her interests in the interaction of periodontal pathogens with the innate immune system regeneration and treatment of peri-implantitis.

In collaboration with colleagues Dr. Denis F. Kinane, Morton Amsterdam Dean and Professor in the Departments of Pathology and Periodontics, and Dr. George Hajishengallis, Professor, Department of Microbiology, she is investigating and refining protocols for the non-surgical treatment of periodontal disease and utilizing different instruments, pharmacological agents, and antibiotics to see if there are advantages to one protocol

over another regarding both the clinical outcome and the immune response to pathogens. The researchers are in the process of seeking funding and close to getting a trial underway.

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She is also working with Dr. Fiorellini on a multi-center clinical trial that is investigating the use of local antibiotics for the non-surgical treatment of peri-implantitis, which is inflammation and infection around the site of an implant. This is a relatively new condition, she notes, since implants have only been used for about 30 years in dentistry.

"At the moment, the treatment of peri-implantitis is more empirical rather than evidence based, and we are in need of high-level evidence-based clinical studies," she says.

Currently, it is primarily postdoctoral students who are involved in these research projects, but, putting on her administrative hat, Dr. Stathopoulou says it is "within my mid-term goals as Assistant Dean for Clinical Affairs to encourage the active involvement of predoctoral students in clinical research."

Thus, while having taken on two distinct roles at Penn Dental Medicine, Dr. Stathopoulou is focusing on how she can leverage one role to further the other.

"Ultimately," she says, "both positions share a common goal—to provide our students with an excellent education and our students and patients with an excellent clinical experience." ■

— By Debbie Goldberg