



Alumni profile: Dr. James Morrison (D'03) *A Life in Balance*

At Penn Dental Medicine, Dr. James Morrison (D'03) experienced the power of a great mentor, and has used what he learned to build a reputation for dental excellence, while caring for his family and his community.

As he prepared to enter graduate school in Penn's Post-Baccalaureate Program, Dr. Morrison — who, as an undergraduate at the University of Pittsburgh, had originally planned to attend medical school — wasn't sure dentistry was the right career for him. His concerns were put to rest through a series of talks with Dr. Raymond Fonseca, the Dean of Penn Dental Medicine from 1989 to 2003.

"Dr. Fonseca showed me that dentistry — an art within the science of medicine — was indeed what I wanted to do," Dr. Morrison remembers. "Our conversations exceeded dentistry and delved into the secrets of balancing life as a man, a provider, and a community leader. Dr. Fonseca taught me to take an introspective approach to navigating my life, and in the process, became my most important mentor."

ABOVE: Dr. James Morrison (D'03) with some Penn Dental Medicine students when he was a guest speaker at the School for this year's Black History Month celebration.

A PASSION FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING

After graduating from dental school, Dr. Morrison, a native of Virginia, went on to Boston University to complete a residency in endodontics, a specialty that suits his passion for solving problems.

When Houston was devastated by Hurricane Harvey in 2017, Dr. Morrison worked with fellow Houston professionals to give back to the city, eventually developing a service and education non-profit called WAIT (We Are In It Together).

"Endodontics allows me to address my patient's issues quickly and efficiently," he says. "I have a solution that can usually be executed in 20 to 40 minutes, ending my patients' pain and restoring their comfort."

Dr. Morrison met his wife, Dr. Joi Shaw Morrison, a pediatric dentist, at a dental school conference. The pair settled in Houston, where Dr. Morrison has steadily built a successful practice. He opened Moberi

Endodontics, with two Houston-area locations, in the mid 2000's. Last year, he purchased Maestro Dental, a large group practice that brings together multiple specialties, including orthodontics, periodontics, endodontics, and oral surgery, under one roof. This innovative model allows Dr. Morrison and his staff to complement the work of general dentists while co-managing patients with other specialists.

"My goal is to build a portfolio of group practices that allow patients to understand the importance of oral health, while establishing an environment where the next generation of providers can enjoy new ways to practice dentistry," he says.

CARING FOR HIS COMMUNITY

Dr. Morrison's family has grown as well: He and Joi, who runs her own private pediatric practice, Pinnacle Pediatric Dentistry, have three children, Jalen, Kingston, and James III. Community service is important to the Morrison family.

When Houston was devastated by Hurricane Harvey in 2017, Dr. Morrison worked with fellow Houston professionals to give back to the city, eventually developing an ongoing service and education non-profit called WAIT (We Are In It Together), of which he is the board president.

"In the aftermath of the hurricane, schools were closed and families were displaced," Dr. Morrison explains. "Dental supplies were hard to come by." Through the National Dental Association, Dr. Morrison petitioned the organization's corporate partners, including Colgate, Procter & Gamble, and Johnson & Johnson, to donate toothbrushes, toothpaste, and other resources, helping thousands of local schoolchildren keep up with their dental care during the disaster.

While visiting the reopened schools, Dr. Morrison and his team realized that seeing health professionals of color was a rarity for black schoolchildren in Houston's poorer neighborhoods. The idea for WAITT was born: Through an annual symposium for middle school students, African-American professionals would share their stories of challenge and success. In April, 200 students attended the event, which Dr. Morrison hopes to open to high school students in the near future.

"I saw myself in many of those kids," Dr. Morrison says. "I wanted a chance to show them what they could become."

A GUEST OF HONOR

This past February, Dr. Morrison returned to Penn Dental Medicine as a special guest at the School's celebration of Black History Month, where he had the opportunity to inspire more young people — this time, dental students who were eager to learn how he had balanced a successful multi-office dental practice with the demands of family and community. The trip back to Philadelphia was an opportunity to reflect on how far he had come: "I am now living out many of the dreams I had back then."

His advice to current dental students was very similar to the words of wisdom he received decades ago from his mentor, Dean Fonseca: "I told them, 'the art of making a living is founded in learning to live; just as much as you receive you should also be willing to give!'"

