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— DR. MARK WOLFF, MORTON AMSTERDAM DEAN

DR. RODRIGO NEIVA

NEW CHAIRMAN EAGERLY BUILDING ON THE DEPARTMENT OF PERIODONTICS' LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE

On his first day as Chair of the Department of Periodontics at Penn Dental Medicine, Rodrigo Neiva, DDS, MS, met with the department's 31 graduate students. "A degree from Penn Dental Medicine comes with a lot of responsibility," he told them. "If you've trained at Penn, people will always want to hear what you have to say."

That stellar reputation is part of what attracted him to Penn Dental Medicine, which he joined September 1 from the University of Florida College of Dentistry, where he was Graduate Program Director and Clinical Professor in the Department of Periodontology.

"This school has so much tradition in my field, it really helped write the history of periodontics," says Dr. Neiva (who also will be appointed Professor of Periodontics pending approval of the appropriate School of Dental Medicine committees, the University's Provost Staff Conference and the Trustees). "I want Penn to continue to be known as a powerhouse of clinical periodontics."

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OPPOSITE: Dr. Rodrigo Neiva joined Penn Dental Medicine in September as the new Chairman of the Department of Periodontics.

With the School's three certificate programs in advanced periodontal training (Periodontics, Periodontal Prosthesis, and the combined Periodontics/Orthodontics program), Penn Dental Medicine has one of the largest number of postdoctoral periodontal students in U.S. dental schools. Students are exposed to all aspects of clinical periodontics in the D. Walter Cohen and Morton Amsterdam Periodontal Clinic, including periodontal and implant surgery, tissue grafting, periodontal prosthesis, adjunctive orthodontics, and complex dentistry.

"We are thrilled to have Dr. Neiva joining the Penn Dental Medicine family," says Morton Amsterdam Dean Mark Wolff. "He brings great experience as a clinician, researcher, and educator to this leadership role, and we believe he will continue to build on the Department's history and reputation for excellence."

With this legacy in mind, Dr. Neiva took time during his first week on campus to outline ambitious plans to reinforce and strengthen the department's influence and leadership across teaching, research, and clinical initiatives in periodontics.

As he starts his new position, Dr. Neiva says one overarching challenge in the specialty is to reassert its traditional focus on saving teeth, and replacing them only when other options are exhausted. Implantation has at times become more of a convenience than a need, he says, one that may be less costly and easier sometimes than the complex dental care, including root canal and crown, required to save a tooth. Another reason to save teeth when possible, he says, is that the longer patients can retain their teeth, the more likely it is that a future implant, if needed, will last their lifetime. "Every implant to me comes with an expiration date," he says.

"I believe we should be the leading specialty in the replacement of teeth, and implantation is a very important part of periodontics," Dr. Neiva says. "But let's not forget our roots as the specialty that helps save and preserve teeth." And with Penn's reputation and leadership, he adds, "I think we can influence other schools."

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Collaboration between dental specialties and other schools at the University of Pennsylvania is a trademark of a Penn Dental Medicine education. Dr. Neiva wants to strengthen interdisciplinary opportunities for periodontal students and ensure the department's doors are wide open to others.

"Periodontics traditionally has been the center of all specialties, and I want our residents to be trained in an interdisciplinary environment," he says. "I want them to rotate into oral surgery so if one day they have to pull an impacted molar, they will learn to do it from oral surgeons. And I want our doors open for other specialties, so if an oral surgeon wants to do a tissue graft, come learn from us. I plan to work closely with every specialty department in the school and value what each department has to offer."

For DMD students, who rotate into the periodontal clinic, Dr. Neiva would like to provide a more intensive experience with more hands-on opportunities, including basic surgical procedures as part of a DMD Periodontal Honors program. He hopes this will not only encourage more students to choose periodontics as a specialty, but also help those going into general dentistry or other specialties become more familiar with working with periodontists to improve patient dental health throughout their careers.

Research is another priority for the new Chair. Building on Penn Dental Medicine's strong research enterprise, Dr. Neiva would like to encourage periodontal research with a focus on procedures, materials, and products that can readily be applied to patient care.

"Laboratory research can only achieve significance if the gap from the bench to the dental chair is bridged," he says. "We have great scientists here in this school, let's see what we can do to bring those ideas to the dental chair." Among his plans to help advance research would be to renovate the periodontics clinic with flexibility to expand access for patient care and DMD student rotations, with dedicated space for clinical research.



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While all levels of research, from basic to translational, are important, Dr. Neiva says his priority is to "help our scientists bring ideas to life, creating new treatment strategies, products, methods, and materials, and with that, have better ways to treat our patients."

To help maximize these efforts, Dr. Neiva wants to encourage more partnerships with other academic institutions, industry researchers, and pharmaceutical companies doing clinical trials, in addition to supporting collaborative research within Penn Dental Medicine and throughout the University.

With his move to Penn Dental Medicine, Dr. Neiva hopes to have more time to devote to his own research. He is currently working on 12 preclinical and clinical trials as co-investigator and expert consultant and has developed many surgical techniques that have been used daily to better serve patients

worldwide. He says he is especially excited at the prospect of collaborating with some of the school's outstanding researchers.

In particular, Dr. Neiva is interested in investigating and developing new materials and techniques for periodontal regeneration, as well as bone and soft tissue augmentation for implant dentistry through translational and clinical research.

"Not every material used for tissue regeneration is capable of adequate turnover," he explains about some of the testing he has done. "For instance, if you add material to act

ABOVE: Dr. Neiva in the periodontics clinic with Dr. Jonathan Korostoff, Professor, and periodontics resident Dr. Joshua Mayer (GD'22).

OPPOSITE: Dr. Neiva with a DMD student in the periodontics clinic; he hopes to enhance the DMD rotation in periodontics with more hands-on opportunities and to establish a periodontal honors program.

as a scaffold to help with tissue regeneration, this material should be gradually replaced by new tissue that grows into the existing tissue defect. Some materials act more as fillers than true scaffolds, affecting the composition and quality of the newly formed tissue. Over the years, we've been able to identify materials that are more capable of achieving the ideal."

A NEW PATH IN ACADEMIC DENTISTRY

Growing up in a Brazilian family of doctors and dentists, Dr. Neiva earned his DDS from Vale do Itajai University in Brazil. He intended to go into private practice, but at the University of Michigan School of Dentistry (where he earned his MS and certificate in periodontics), one of his mentors, William Giannobile, DDS, MS, DMSc, now Chair of Michigan's Department of Periodontics and Oral Medicine, urged him to take a three-year clinical faculty position — a fortuitous move that suited him so well it led to a career in academic dentistry.

In 2010, he joined the University of Florida College of Dentistry, where he helped turn periodontics at the school into a more competitive program, with some 80 applicants now vying for four spots. The program became known for the quality of clinical training and 100% passing rate in the American Board of Periodontology written and oral exams.

At both the University of Florida and University of Michigan, Dr. Neiva actively mentored and advised a host of master's degree student candidates. He has been recognized for his distinguished teaching with numerous awards, including the American Academy of Periodontology Educator Award in 2006 and 2016. Dr. Neiva is a Fellow in the Pierre Fauchard Academy and the American College of Dentists. He is a Diplomate of the American Board of Periodontology and of the International Congress of Oral Implantology. Dr. Neiva now serves as Examiner for the American Board of Periodontology and was recently elected the youngest ever Director of the American Board of Periodontology.

With his extensive experience in teaching, research, and as a clinician, Dr. Neiva is well positioned to build on the legacy of Penn Dental Medicine's Department of Periodontics and ensure it continues to be a leader in the specialty in the 21st century. "One of the things that excites me most about being here at Penn is to help the school be even better than it has always been," he says. And he knows it will take a concerted effort of many to achieve the greatest benefits.

"Ultimately," Dr. Neiva says, "a successful Chair is determined by the success of the faculty and students in the department."

— By Debbie Goldberg

RODRIGO NEIVA, DDS, MS

EDUCATION

DDS

Vale do Itajai University, Brazil, 1997

Certificate in Periodontics

University of Michigan, 2003

MS, Periodontics

University of Michigan, 2004

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Regeneration of hard and soft tissue, including investigating and developing new materials and techniques for periodontal regeneration, as well as bone and soft tissue augmentation for implant dentistry.

ORGANIZED DENTISTRY

American Board of Periodontology
Board Director

American Board of Periodontology
Oral Exam Committee

American Board of Periodontology
Board Examiner

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

International Journal of Oral Implantology

REVIEWER

Journal of Periodontology

International Journal of Periodontics and Restorative Dentistry

International Journal of Oral Maxillofacial Implants

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