

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

VIEWS ON THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE



Dr. Catherine Lee (D'18, GD'20) is presently pursuing postdoctoral specialty training in the School's pediatric program.

Transitioning to Postdoctoral Study

Contributed by Dr. Catherine Lee (D'18, GD'20)

With the arrival of the Class of 2023 to Penn Dental Medicine, it's only given me pause to think about how I was once in their shoes. Starting dental school was such an exciting time knowing that this was just the beginning of an adventure. The years flew by with lectures in B13, late night wax-ups in the lab, and study sessions across Penn's different libraries. Soon that four-year adventure became a six-year one as I started a pediatric residency at Penn Dental Medicine.

My two biggest fears of starting residency were that I wouldn't wake up to the sound of the pager while on call and I wouldn't actually love the field that I had picked. Looking back at my first concern, I can now see that it was ridiculous – there is absolutely no way you can sleep through the incessant noise of a pager in the middle of the night. Now that I'm finishing off my last year of residency, I can say that my second concern was also absurd. Residency

has shown me that pediatric dentistry is exactly what I should be doing. I won't lie and say that every day is sunshine and rainbows, but I can at least look back and know that I did my best to help each and every patient that I saw.

Dentistry is a unique field because you have the option to return to specialty training at any point in your career. I know that it can be daunting to make a decision about the rest of your life so early in dental school, and that's why I recommend to really explore the different fields and programs. Even though I had spent a good amount of time within the pediatric clinic while a DMD student, the residency was still very different from what I expected. For instance, I had never appreciated the sheer volume of patients seen by the pediatric residents, the average medical complexity of these patients, or how many unique rotations the residents had access to because of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). While I

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thought I had a good grasp of the program at Penn, in reality, I had greatly underestimated the program's strengths until I got to the interview. It had been easy to overlook something I had taken for granted for the past few years. This is why I definitely recommend shadowing private practices or doing an externship at residency programs to help understand the amount of variety that exists.

Staying at Penn for two more years was also a big decision for me. Most of my classmates were excited to pursue other opportunities outside of Philadelphia, and at first, I thought that's what I wanted as well. However, after going on interviews across the continent, I quickly changed my mind. Things that I valued at first, such as location or stipend, were replaced with strong mentorship and experiences. Honestly, I can't imagine going through residency without my current attendings, and especially Dr. Betty Hajishengallis, Chief of the Division of Pediatric Dentistry.

At the end of the day, everyone asks if I'm enjoying residency and if I'm happy to have stayed at Penn. For me, that answer has always been a definite yes. Although there are days when my smile falters from a long night of call or a tricky patient, I have no regrets of staying for two more years. Penn has changed quite a bit from when I first started, and it's exciting to see how the dental school has grown so much. I have learned so much from my time at Penn, and I'll always be thankful for everyone that has made my experience so much better!