

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

VIEWS ON THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE



Creating a Space for Education on IDD in Orthodontics

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Our third- and fourth-year rotations in Penn Dental Medicine's new Personalized Care Suite expanded our understanding of what it means to treat a population that requires more specialized care. Treating individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their associated complex medical conditions requires additional, and often unconventional skills.

When working with people with IDD, these skills become essential to ensure successful patient care and a positive experience for the patient as well as their caregivers. These skills include maintaining flexibility with appointment times, utilizing and potentially modifying additional equipment and instruments, accommodating caregivers, and employing behavioral techniques. Most importantly, patience is extremely valuable when working with IDD individuals due to communication barriers and the need to often adapt.

From speaking to many patients and their caregivers, we came to understand how challenging it was for them to find providers who would treat them once they aged out of their pediatric dentists. Going a step further, we became interested in learning how to treat individuals with IDD in the field of orthodontics and how the dental specialties collaborate to treat these patients.

This past Spring, we created the Orthodontics & Special Needs Club. We invited a variety of dental specialists, including pediatric dentists, orthodontists, and orthodontic residents to discuss their treatment experiences with the IDD community. They shared cases, answered questions, and taught how to best treat these individuals from both a behavioral and dental perspective. Our goal with this organization is to promote advocacy and educate classmates and ourselves on the practicalities of treating patients with IDD. After

speaking with practicing orthodontists who specialize in treating the IDD population, we learned the creative tools they employ to best suit each patient's unique needs. For example, during their first visit to the office, there is often no treatment performed, just a simulated appointment to desensitize the patient to the new environment. By bringing in these specialists, including several Penn Dental Medicine alumni, this club has created conversations regarding the best way to manage and treat IDD patients, taking what we learn in the classroom and applying it to use in the Personalized Care Suite and our future dental careers.

Expanding our knowledge about the practicalities of treating the IDD population has been a meaningful step toward feeling prepared for clinical practice. By increasing student exposure to the possibilities of treatment modifications and patient management, we hope that students will become more open to treating IDD patients in the future regardless of whatever specialty they intend to pursue. We are currently planning a speaker series this fall for selective credit centered around the clinical workflow of treating this population. Our hope is that this club will continue to grow and engage the Penn Dental Medicine community in the future.

Penn Dental Medicine has been a great advocate for expanding the clinical education of its students to treat patients with IDD. We have benefited from the support of the faculty in the Personalized Care Suite, Penn Dental Orthodontic Clinic, and the Alumni Association who have connected us with incredible alumni who take the time to mentor, support, and nurture Penn Dental students. This endeavor has broadened our perspective toward treating this community with the hope that every patient with IDD has equitable access to the full range of specialty care while feeling seen and supported.

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ABOVE (L to R):Rebecca Muller (D'23), Kristi Truong (D'23), and Brooke Talsania (D'23).