

STUDENT PROFILE:
SEJAL MENGHANI (D'23)



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Engaged in community outreach and oral health promotion activities as well, Menghani sees dental anesthesiology as playing a crucial role in extending access to care.

“After getting direct experience with patients with extreme dental anxiety as well as special healthcare needs, I knew that one of my goals was to optimize the patient experience and increase access to care for those unable to be treated through traditional dentistry,” she says. “And after shadowing our in-house dental anesthesiologist in the pediatric clinic, I can see how dental anesthesiologists play such an important role in providing a safe and comfortable environment for patients, decreasing dental trauma, and enabling patients to establish a dental home.”

As part of the School’s First Five Community Health Honors Program, focused on oral health promotion for children five and under, Menghani saw first-hand how anesthesia can help young patients with severe anxiety, special needs, and conditions like early childhood caries that necessitate extensive dental treatment.

“I hope to one day be a part of this rapidly growing field that helps children and adults of all backgrounds feel safe during their journey to a healthy smile,” says Menghani.

Forging a Path in Dental Anesthesia

Sejal Menghani (D'23) knew in her teens that she wanted to be a dentist and was accepted into Penn Dental Medicine’s Bio-Dental Consortial Program, allowing her to complete her B.A. in biology and D.M.D. degree at University of Pennsylvania in seven years.

Although she previously envisioned herself pursuing a traditional dentistry path to a clinical specialty and private practice, she has found herself drawn to the emerging field of dental anesthesia over her time in dental school.

“Dental anesthesiology was not even on my radar until my second year when we had a dental anesthesiologist as a guest lecturer for one of our pharmacology courses,” recalls Menghani, whose interest in the field has only continued to grow since then. “The idea of using pharmacological intervention to alleviate pain and anxiety has always fascinated me.”

Over the past two years, she has pursued dental anesthesiology externships at medical centers in New York, Ohio, and Pittsburgh. She sought out shadowing opportunities with Penn Dental Medicine’s dental anesthesiologist, Dr. Man Ching Ho, Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatric Dentistry, who has become one of her mentors. Last year, Menghani founded and serves as President of the Penn Dentist Anesthesiologist Club for Students, which now has more than 65 members. She was one of two Penn Dental Medicine students who attended the American Society of Dentist Anesthesiologists annual conference in Atlanta last spring.

RECOGNIZED FOR PROMOTING ORAL HEALTH

Menghani has participated in a wide range of academic, leadership, and community service opportunities at Penn Dental Medicine. During her experience with the Bridging the Gaps Community Health Internship Program, Menghani helped design an interactive curriculum promoting education and healthy lifestyles for K-to-5 students in West Philadelphia. She also served as Co-President and Fundraising Chair for the School's Philadelphia Oral Cancer Walk & 5K and volunteered in the Penn Dental Medicine care center serving Afghan refugees.

In light of her academic record and co-curricular activities, Menghani recently was awarded a \$5,000 scholarship from the Dental Trade Alliance Foundation for dental students who demonstrate academic excellence and a commitment to community service.

The award "validated all the projects I put so much of my heart and soul into," Menghani says. "It definitely motivates me to continue working on these projects, reducing oral health disparities, helping those with special needs, and advocating for kids to receive early intervention."

SUPPORTING PEERS

At Penn, Menghani also serves as a peer advisor in the Bio-Dental Program, providing younger students with the support she benefited from earlier in her studies. It wasn't easy to get through Penn undergraduate in three years, she says, but creating a community with other Bio-Dental students where students collaborate, figure out which classes to take, and check in with each other helped ease the way.

"When I was a freshman and sophomore, it was really cool to see someone in dental school living out the dream I wanted," says Menghani, who plans to do a three-year residency program in dental anesthesia after she graduates. "And now I get to pay it forward."

Dr. Nipul Tanna Named Associate Chair of Orthodontics

Dr. Nipul Tanna (D'90, GD'92, GD'10, GD'11), Associate Professor of Clinical Orthodontics at Penn Dental Medicine, has been named Associate Chair of the School's Department of Orthodontics. His appointment to this new leadership post was effective June 1.

"Dr. Tanna brings a long history with the School and our Department of Orthodontics to this new position," says Penn Dental Medicine's Morton Amsterdam Dean, Dr. Mark S. Wolff. "The Department is growing with new programs and faculty, and he is uniquely qualified to help steer the Department in partnership with Dr. Chung." Dr. Chun-Hsi Chung (D'86, GD'92), who has led the Department as Chair since 2011, continues in that role.

A member of the School's Orthodontics faculty since 2013, Dr. Tanna has directed the combined orthodontics and periodontics postdoctoral program since 2017. Dr. Tanna completed his postdoctoral training in both orthodontics and periodontics at Penn Dental Medicine in 2010 and was a senior research fellow in the Department of Periodontics from 2010 to 2015, earning his MS in Oral Biology in 2011. He is a Diplomate of both the American Board of Periodontology (2013) and the American Board of Orthodontics (2014).

Dr. Tanna began his dental career in restorative dentistry. Earning his DMD from Penn Dental Medicine in 1990, he went on to complete an AEGD residency at Penn Dental in 1992 after which he joined the School's faculty practice as a general restorative clinician. He was part of the School's Department of Preventive & Restorative Sciences faculty from 1994 to 1999, serving as a DMD program group leader for clinical instruction during that time. From 1999–2004 he was the Associate Director for a faculty practice site, Penn Dental at The Robert Schattner Center. He also held a Restorative faculty position from 2001 to 2005 before beginning his postdoctoral study in orthodontics and periodontics.

A highly regarded clinician and educator, Dr. Tanna was recognized with the Excellence in Clinical Instruction Award from the Penn Dental Medicine Department of Orthodontics in 2016, 2018, and 2021.



Dr. Nipul Tanna (D'90, GD'92, GD'10, GD'11)