

# ALUMNI ANCHOR

2020 | 2021



## Coping with COVID-19

MDR's finest moment

+ Preparing  
for the future  
with digital  
dentistry

Providing oral  
healthcare in  
Tanzania

The duty of global  
citizens

Paediatric  
dentistry during  
a pandemic

A unique learning  
opportunity

Alumni face  
the challenge  
of reopening

Joy, fear, and PPE



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**On our cover:** Cheryl Mullen processes dental instruments in the MDR unit.

**Art Direction/Design:** Shawn Dalton/Jocelyn Spence

**ALUMNI ANCHOR**



# Dean's message

One year ago, we could not have imagined that our world would be dealing with the impact of a global pandemic. For our profession—dentists and dental hygienists alike—COVID-19 is a very real threat to the health of our patients and ourselves. The pandemic has dramatically affected our ability to operate our practices and treat patients. Here in the Faculty of Dentistry, we also had to radically rethink how we teach our students.

It has not been an easy time. And yet, as I write this message, I am filled with pride and appreciation for the many ways in which so many of you—students, residents, staff, faculty, alumni, donors—have stepped up to provide care and support in many different ways.

After the chief medical officer of Nova Scotia closed our clinics in March, our Faculty was one of the first three emergency clinics in the province to treat patients. Our new, hospital-grade surgical rooms provided the safe space we needed and Dr. Chris Lee (DDS'04) assembled a great team of residents, faculty, alumni, and other volunteers to liaise with private practice dentists and treat emergency cases. Chris and his team also developed a set of COVID-19 protocols and procedures which have been widely shared with clinics and universities across Canada.

Some of the hidden heroes of our Faculty are the members of our medical device reprocessing team. Their training has prepared them well for this extraordinary moment in history and they haven't missed a beat during the pandemic. Without question, they have been vital members of the emergency team.

Here is a selection of the initiatives our faculty, alumni, staff, and students have taken in response to the pandemic:

- ▶ Shauna Hachey (DDH'04, BDH '12) and other members of the Healthy Population Institute team (see p. 30) decided to make 200 oral health care kits for intensive care units across the province, to help and thank the nursing staff who work in them.



- ▶ When she was unable to provide care to her own patients, Dr. Simar Hundal (DDS'11) stayed busy by delivering lunches to care workers at Northwood Manor.
- ▶ Dr. Maria Haddad (DDS'17) and the Halifax Lebanese Society delivered 2000 meals to front-line healthcare workers to say thank you for their efforts. Our emergency clinic team was delighted to receive—and enjoy—a delivery of delicious Lebanese lunches!
- ▶ When the pandemic first struck in March, our faculty members and students quickly made the transition to online teaching and learning. The lessons learned will help during the upcoming fall term, when all lectures will be online.
- ▶ Our faculty members, residents, and students have been sharing their knowledge of COVID-19 and other topics through webinars and online interviews.
- ▶ Our CE office provided a program of free online CE courses this spring. Watch out for more online courses this autumn.
- ▶ Alumni, faculty, and staff have donated to the Dal student emergency fund to help students cope during this uncertain and financially stressful time.

Although this issue of the *Alumni Anchor* focuses heavily on the pandemic and our response to the crisis, it is important to

remember that the death of George Floyd in the United States has had worldwide repercussions, including in our Dalhousie community. It cannot be said often enough that racism and discrimination have no place in our Faculty. We will continue to work to improve equity, diversity, inclusion, and access so that everyone who learns, works, and receives care here feels recognized, safe, and welcome. We value the great diversity of our Faculty and believe that it enriches every aspect of teaching, learning, and patient care.

The year ahead looks different from what it would normally, and we are unable to hold many of our regular alumni events and visits. But creativity and innovation are prevailing in this aspect of our pandemic-influenced life, too, and there will be opportunities for alumni to connect with each other and the Faculty of Dentistry. Our alumni and extended community of retired faculty members, friends, and supporters remain vital members of our Faculty. Please watch your in-box for invitations and requests for your input on new alumni initiatives.

In the meantime, I wish you all the best as you continue to care for your patients. These are challenging times, but as healthcare providers, we can be proud of our contribution to keeping people healthy.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Davis  
Dean, Faculty of Dentistry

## Francine Leach gets CDHA recognition

Francine Leach was one of two honourable mentions in this year's CDHA Dental Hygiene Superhero competition out of a total of 755 nominees from across Canada.



Francine is an oral health outreach navigator and dental hygienist at the North End Community Health Centre and a part-time faculty member in the Dalhousie School of Dental Hygiene.

Nominees were evaluated on their client focus, empowerment through education, accountability, leadership, integrity, respect, and compassion. Francine can tick all those boxes and more! ⚡

## Volunteer helps students help patients

Matthew Goodz (DH '11) has a history of using his talents as a dental hygienist to benefit those facing barriers to care. Earlier in his career he organized and participated in many free dental hygiene days, but he always wanted to do more.

Matthew began volunteering with the Faculty of Dentistry's New Immigrant and Refugee Oral Health Clinic as a clinic instructor. This clinic relies on generous volunteers like Matthew to supervise and support students, working alongside faculty members as they treat patients who are new to Canada and often have complicated oral health needs.

"I help the students help the patients," Matthew explains. From October 2019 until the mandated shutdown of dental clinics in March 2020, Matthew attended every scheduled clinic each Monday evening. He often arrived after a long day of private practice to lend a helping hand and, in his words, "be a cheerleader for students and bolster their confidence".

"Our alumni volunteers have a huge impact on the experience of our students and the new refugees we provide care to in the clinic," says Heather Doucette, an associate professor in the Dalhousie School of Dental Hygiene and director of the New Immigrant and Refugee Oral Health Clinic.

"We just couldn't do it without the help of Matthew Goodz and long-time volunteer and supporter Susan Keating-Bekkers. They show up faithfully each week to help our students provide the best care possible to these patients, most of whom have extensive oral healthcare needs. Through their professionalism, knowledge, and kindness, they are also excellent role models for our students."

**Interested in volunteering?** If you are interested in volunteering with this clinic or have any questions about volunteering with the Faculty, please contact [alumni.dentistry@dal.ca](mailto:alumni.dentistry@dal.ca). ⚡



## Dentistry Alumni Committee update

This year has been like no other. Our profession has faced challenges we didn't think possible, which have forced us to pause and reflect on what is most important.

Like many of you, the members of the Dentistry Alumni Committee have felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. When clinics were required to close in March, our thoughts went out to all members of our alumni and extended community. We know how difficult it was for you to shut down your clinics and be unable to provide care to your patients.

Our thoughts and concerns were also with the graduating class of 2020—soon to be our colleagues—who saw their last semester interrupted and graduation celebrations put on hold. The DAC decided to celebrate the graduating class a little differently this year, with a congratulatory video instead of in-person hugs and handshakes. We wish the class of 2020 all the best and look forward to participating in their postponed celebrations when they become possible.

As ambassadors of the Dalhousie Dentistry alumni community, the DAC fielded questions and concerns from alumni regarding our students whose education was interrupted by the pandemic. These kind messages were greatly appreciated and truly showcase the closeness of our network.

In April, we were faced with the difficult but well-informed decision to cancel Homecoming 2020 events, originally scheduled for September 24–26. Instead, we plan to hold Homecoming in September 2021, including the JD McLean Lecture, White Coat Ceremony, Continuing Education Day, and Celebration Dinner with the presentation of the Outstanding Alumni Awards.

Although we are disappointed that we will not be able to honour all our Outstanding Alumni Award recipients this September, they will be properly showcased once we can all be together again. There is one award recipient the committee couldn't wait one more year to highlight. Please watch your inboxes in September 2020 for a message recognizing

this special member of our community.

COVID-19 may have changed our world, but the DAC remains steadfast in representing our alumni community and helping to shape alumni programming. Long-time chair of the committee, Dr. Lee Erickson, will move into the position of past-chair and remain on the DAC as an ex-officio member. A new committee chair will be chosen at the first meeting in September. Prof. Shauna Hachey and Dr. Mark Sutherland have now left the committee to focus on other priorities and we thank them for their hard work over the years. We welcomed Ms. Amanda Lee and Ms. Kristen Gamache as new members this past year and we look forward to welcoming Dr. Sarah Davidson as a new member this upcoming year.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the *Alumni Anchor* and thank you for keeping in touch with your Dalhousie Faculty of Dentistry. ⚡



## Nicole MacDonald: A 2019 Hu-Friedy NEVI 2.0 CDHA Scholarship winner

With her sights set on a master’s degree in health education and ultimately teaching, bachelor of dental hygiene student Nicole MacDonald was a fitting recipient of a 2019 Hu-Friedy NEVI 2.0 CDHA Scholarship. It is the first time a Dalhousie University School of Dental Hygiene student has received one of these prestigious awards.

Five scholarship winners from across the country were selected, with Nicole the only recipient from Atlantic Canada. The scholarships were created to help support Canadian dental hygienists with further education in bachelor or master’s programs.

Originally from Port Hood in Cape Breton, Nicole studied science at St. Francis Xavier University for two years and then went to Ottawa to take the 18-month, fast-track dental hygiene program at the Canadian National Institute of Health. Following graduation, Nicole began her career at the Port Hawkesbury Dental Group

with Dalhousie alumni, Drs. Jessica Sanford (DDS’16) and Michael Nemeč (DDS’78).

Nicole started the BDH program at Dal in 2019, believing that it would prepare her for further studies and future teaching.

“I am really interested in research, so that side of the BDH program appealed to me, and I hope to teach in the future. The area of public health also interests me,” says Nicole, “because it brings together dental hygiene and education.”

During the BDH program, Nicole appreciated the variety of learning experiences she gained through rotations at the Cancer Care Centre, the IWK Health Centre, the North End Community Health Centre, and school visits. She was also able to take advantage of an internship that involved her in research and a new fluoride varnish program for schools.

Nicole plans to pursue a master’s degree in the autumn. ↴

## Continuing Professional Education 2020–2021 Continuing Dental Education Program

**We are keeping the doors of learning open with online continuing dental education courses**

A variety of continuing dental education courses will be offered virtually this year, with some in-person certification courses:

- A range of course times, including evenings and Saturday mornings
- One-hour to three-hour sessions
- A wide range of general and specialist topics
- In-person certification courses (as allowed)
- Expert speakers from the Faculty of Dentistry and other institutions

Watch for course listings and program updates on our social media channels and the CE website.

For more information or to be added to our mailing list, contact CPE at [cde.dentistry@dal.ca](mailto:cde.dentistry@dal.ca)



[dal.ca/dentistry/cde](http://dal.ca/dentistry/cde)

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📌 Dalhousie Dentistry Continuing Education



**#STRIKEFORBLACKLIVES**

Faculty, staff, and students from the Faculty of Dentistry joined the June 10 march on the Halifax Commons in support of #strikeforblacklives. Staff and faculty who work in the ER and Urgent Care clinics who were unable to attend because of their work commitments showed their support by taking a knee. ⚡

**2020 Student Impact Award winner:  
Mohammed Alshateel**

Dentistry student Mohammed Alshateel was the winner of the Faculty Leadership Award for the Faculty of Dentistry at the 2019-2020 Dalhousie University Student Impact Awards in the spring.

Moe—as everyone knows him—is a contagious and positive force in the Dentistry Building through his lively and positive personality and his tireless volunteer efforts on committees and in the Faculty’s outreach clinics, on top of the demands of his studies.

Whether volunteering as an interpreter in the Faculty of Dentistry New Immigrant and Refugee Oral Health Clinic, bringing his ideas and enthusiasm to the Dentistry Alumni Committee, or going above and beyond his duties as an assistant with Dentistry Continuing Education, Moe is always enthusiastic, dedicated, and eager to learn from others.

We frequently call upon Moe to represent our student body in thanking donors and sponsors at receptions and other events, knowing that he will do it well and with his characteristic sense of humour. ⚡



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## Jade Wile 2020 recipient of top awards in academics and clinical care

Jade Wile was the top student in dental hygiene for 2020, receiving both the College of Dental Hygienists of NS Award for highest academic standing in all subjects and the Halifax County Dental Society award for demonstrating the greatest proficiency in clinical dental hygiene.

“This is a remarkable accomplishment,” says Dr. Leigha Rock, director of the School of Dental Hygiene. “In my experience, excelling academically does not necessarily mean you will excel with your hands or in the critical components of patient care, such as professionalism, ethics, communication, and empathy. Winning both the top academic award and the top clinical award really highlights how well-rounded Jade is.”

Jade will work at Seaport Dental in Port Williams alongside two dentists and another dental hygienist. †

### Alumni dates

#### Virtual Alumni Reception

(Atlantic Region)  
October 15, 2020  
7:00-8:00 pm AST

#### Virtual Alumni Reception

(Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba)  
October 22, 2020  
6:30-7:30 pm MDT

Watch your inboxes for invitations!

## EMILY BONANG RECEIVES TOP DENTISTRY AWARD

Emily Bonang is the 2020 recipient of the Dr. David Precious Gold Medal in Dentistry.

In his congratulatory message, Dr. Davis said that Emily shared many of the same qualities as Dr. David Precious, former dean of the Faculty of Dentistry and after whom the gold medal in dentistry is named: “intelligence, compassion, dedication to the profession and [your] patients.”

Emily comes from a long line of oral health professionals. Her grandfather (Dr. Donald Bonang, DDS’62,) parents

(Drs. Jeffrey Bonang and Laurie Campbell Bonang, both DDS’87), and brother Jordan (DDS’20) are all dentists and alumni of Dalhousie.

Like everyone in her class, Emily is disappointed that their four years of dentistry school were cut short by the pandemic. “I know we will [celebrate] later at some point. The friends I made here are my forever friends.”

Emily has joined Cole Harbour Dental Centre, her parents’ practice, as an associate. †



## GETTING CREATIVE WITH CE

Continuing education took the bold step of switching to online this spring. The move was prompted by COVID-19, but its success—and the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic—means that virtual CE is here to stay.

In May, a graduate CE program was offered to new dentistry and dental hygiene grads, and covered topics such as ultrasonic scaling and airflow therapy, suturing, implant topics, the WaveOne endodontic system, interviewing skills, and mentor panels for each group of graduates. Some staff members also participated in the courses and had the opportunity to receive CE credits. Participants enjoyed both the range of topics offered and the convenience of doing them from home.

“The CE program for graduates has been in existence for four years, but this was the first year there were courses specifically for dental hygiene graduates,” says Catherine Lyle, continuing education manager. “Participation rates were very good, so I hope to make this a regular part of the CE program.”

The graduate CE program was immediately

followed by the launch of five, free online courses for the dental community.

“We wanted to give back to our community for its past support of our CE courses, plus it was a great opportunity to test the new online format,” says Lyle. “Dentistry faculty members volunteered their time to teach these courses, which was very generous of them.”

The five online courses were offered both live and recorded, with participants able to gain CE credits upon successful completion of an online quiz. Topics included a pediatric dentistry update, a new classification system for periodontics, a review of dry mouth, implant treatment in the esthetic zone, and partial coverage restorations.

For the fall/winter 2020-21 season, all didactic courses will be offered virtually for a minimum fee. There will be “lots of variety” for all oral health professions, says Lyle. The schedule will be posted on the CE website as courses are confirmed.

To be added to the CE distribution list, please email [cde.dentistry@dal.ca](mailto:cde.dentistry@dal.ca). You can also find out about upcoming courses by following the CE social media accounts. †

# Reunited!

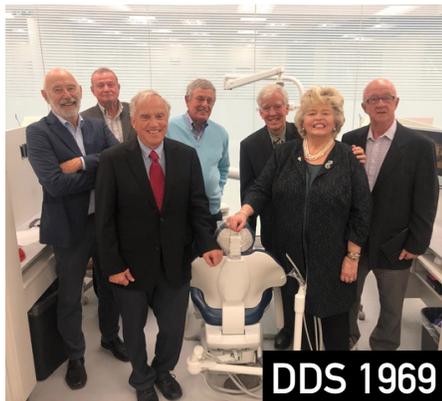
Congratulations to all those who celebrated graduation milestones this year. Here are a few photos of reunions hosted at the Faculty of Dentistry.

Please note that Homecoming has been moved to September 23-26, 2021. The event line-up includes a full day of CE and a formal dinner to celebrate our Outstanding Alumni Award recipients. We encourage you to gather together your classmates and schedule your class reunion during Homecoming 2021. Contact alumni.dentistry@dal.ca to find out how we can help.



↑ Dr. Leigha Rock helped four members of the DH class of '69 celebrate their 50th reunion in September.

→ Members of the DDS '69 class tour the Dr. William Murphy Dental Clinic during their 50th reunion in October. Back row (l to r): Drs. Cliff Murray, Ralph Rix, Stanley Jacobson, Edward Kirk, William Sinnott. Front row (l to r): Vernon Shaffner, Elaine Gordon.



↑ The DDS '85 class didn't let a global pandemic stop them from getting together on their 35th anniversary.



↑ The DDS '89 class gathered in Halifax to celebrate their 30-year anniversary.



↑ **Reunion Dinner @ Inn on the Lake**  
The DH '69 class celebrated their reunion at a dinner with former acting director (1968-9) of the School of Dental Hygiene, Dr. Alastair MacLeod. Pictured (l to r) are: Hazel MacRae, Brenda (Power) Ziemer, Irene (Moland) Chapman, Gail (Simms) Cooper, Susan (Comeau) Hardie, Dr. Alastair MacLeod, Donna (Newman) Thompson, Glenda Butt, Lynne (Stratton) Grant.



← The DH '79 class toured the Dentistry Building with Dr. Leigha Rock and visited Sherriff Hall, their former residence.



Janice McNamara  
inspects a handpiece.

## MDR: Stopping the chain of infection

By Cheryl Bell

**Behind a set of locked metal doors, the Faculty of Dentistry’s medical device reprocessing (MDR) unit would not look out of place in a science fiction film. The overwhelming impression is of white and steel, apart from the neat stacks of blue sterilization wrap-covered packages of instruments. The walls are dotted with first-aid and eyewash stations and sharps disposal containers.**

When the Faculty’s clinics are in full swing, the MDR team of 10 rotates through four shifts a day, 6:30 to 2:30, 7:00 am to 3:00 pm, 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, and 10:30 to 6:30. On Mondays there is a 1:00 pm to 9:00 pm shift to cover the weekly New Immigrant and Refugee Oral Health Clinic. Their task is to sterilize the thousands of dental instruments that are used in the dental school’s clinics each week.

The arrival of COVID-19 has added a new

urgency to their work, but their central mission—even in pandemic-free times—is to stop the chain of infection.

“What we do is so obvious and yet it’s not,” says Cheryl Mullen, one of the MDR technicians on the team. “Without MDR, the whole system would collapse.”

“This is what we live for,” says Lisa Crotty, supervisor of the MDR team. “Making equipment safe for people to use is the main point of our profession.”

### CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

When the chief medical officer for Nova Scotia closed down dental clinics at the end of March, the Faculty of Dentistry’s clinic reopened as one of just three emergency clinics in the province.

Working under new protocols, the oral healthcare providers in the clinic were instructed to behave as if every patient were infected with COVID-19. Likewise, in MDR, all staff were trained to assume that every

instrument was contaminated with the virus.

“It’s at times like these that everyone can see the value in what we do,” says Crotty. “Even though we were well prepared for this moment, we had several meetings to address the question of how we could still function and keep everyone safe.”

While the clinic treated emergency patients each morning with a small team of faculty, residents, and volunteers, reserving the afternoons for cleaning and reviewing protocols, MDR operated with rotating teams of two, who went into the Faculty twice a week to process instruments. By working this way, staff numbers in the building were kept to a minimum.

Although standards are normally rigorous, MDR protocols were adjusted to bump up infection control measures even further. The MDR staff normally wear full PPE when they are dealing with soiled instruments, but for the emergency clinic they added higher level hospital-grade masks, goggles, upgraded surgical caps, and disposable plastic shields for use when hand-cleaning instruments. Instruments were hand-dried rather than blow-dried with clean compressed air to

minimize the use of aerosols.

Every instrument has a name and is inspected prior to the sterilization process. The blue sterilization wrap is sealed with heat-sensitive tape, so it is obvious when it has been processed in the sterilizer. Importantly, every tray of instruments has a stamp that indicates what sterilizer the tray went into, what sterilization cycle was used, and the date the tray was sterilized. “We can track anything,” says Janice McNamara, which is important if the instruments need to be recalled for any reason.

The added precautions taken when the emergency clinic was the only clinic providing care may have increased the number of precautions taken in the MDR unit, but they also made the space eerily quiet. “This room is usually noisy with the sterilizers beeping and buzzing, the sound of equipment being washed, and the clinking of metal on metal,” says Crotty. “With only one sterilizer and one piece of washing equipment operating at a time, it felt like a very different place because it was so quiet.”

The upside of working under the strict protocols was the sense of connectedness

among the group. Bi-weekly Zoom meetings helped to keep the group feel supported and that it was working as a unit, even though there was little in-person contact.

Crotty also says that the experience has had its rewards. “It’s at these times that we see the value in what we do. It brings us happiness to be part of the reason why the Faculty has the option to keep the clinic open. We’re very proud of that.”

## GETTING BACK TO “NORMAL”

As restrictions on dental practices have lifted and the Faculty of Dentistry gained university approval to bring back its students for the current academic year, the MDR unit is returning to a normal schedule, with all the beeping, buzzing, and other noises that it entails. The high level of PPE is here to stay for a while, however, as are the precautionary measures the team is taking to avoid creating aerosols.

“We’re excited to be back working together as a team,” says Crotty, “and we’re even pleased that the pandemic offered us an opportunity to re-evaluate and build on our existing safety protocols.” ⚡

DANNY ABRIEL



A cart of clinic trays is loaded into the cart-washing machine.

**“It’s at times like these that everyone can see the value in what we do.”**



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# AGNIVO RAKSHIT

## Practice, dedication, and a love for your work

By Cheryl Bell

Agnivo Rakshit (DDH'20) had never been to a dental hygienist before he decided to become one. But that didn't stop him from falling in love with the profession or finding that it has changed his life forever.

Agnivo was born, raised, and went to high school in Kolkata, India. He visited the dentist, but never saw a dental hygienist. "Dental hygiene is quite a new profession in India," he explains.

### FROM INDIA TO NEWFOUNDLAND

The path to dental hygiene began in Newfoundland. At the age of 18 Agnivo took the bold step of leaving India and starting a BSc degree at Memorial University (MUN). For two years he studied biology and psychology, becoming acquainted with snow for the first time and, despite some initial homesickness, basking in the company of the warm-hearted Newfoundlanders he met.

It was also at MUN that Agnivo began to consider the question, "What next?"

When he began studying sciences in St. John's, Agnivo felt strongly that he wanted to work in health sciences, but he didn't know which career path he would pursue. From his experience with dentists, he knew that oral health was a "rewarding field and a good career" that involved helping people.

Agnivo began googling careers in oral health and looked at various websites on careers ranging from dental assisting to oral and maxillofacial surgery. Dental hygiene was among the mix of options. It intrigued him and he kept reading more and more about it.

"In life," says Agnivo, "you often don't know what you will like until you try it." And that certainly proved true for him.

### AND FROM NEWFOUNDLAND TO DALHOUSIE

After his two years at MUN, Agnivo had all the prerequisites for the dental hygiene program and he was accepted at Dalhousie.

Right from the start, he knew he had made the right decision. "I had wonderful instructors," he says, "and they made me fall in love with this profession. They were my mentors, my professors, and they helped me every step of the way."

That's not to say it was easy. In the first semester there were 10 subject courses. Not surprisingly, it was overwhelming to be with. There was also the hands-on training, which was completely new, but also intriguing to Agnivo.

"I found myself very curious about the dentiforms and the instruments," he says. "In dental hygiene, it's not enough to have a good theoretical knowledge. You need to know proper techniques as well. I found that practice, dedication, and a love for your work made it easy to learn."

Seeing patients brought new challenges, such as time management. "I needed to learn how to multi-task and balance caring for my patients with building my speed and other tasks like recording information," he explains. "My instructors helped me a lot with this."

The best part of the job, says Agnivo, is making people happy. "It is a very satisfying profession because when you have debrided someone's teeth, removed all the calculus and biofilm, they smile better and with confidence."

### MANY LESSONS LEARNED

Important lessons were also learned on the many rotations dental hygiene students go through. At the New Immigrant and Refugee Oral Health Clinic, Agnivo says that he learned about the cultural aspects of care. For many of the clinic's patients, the oral health care they received in the Dal clinic was the first they had had in a long time.

"Not only did we have to treat their oral conditions, but we had to help them understand our profession and the importance of good oral health care," says Agnivo.

A rotation in the paediatric clinic at Harbour View Elementary School gave Agnivo exposure to looking after children. As an only child

and with no real experience with children, he says this was something he needed. He feels treating children gave him new communication skills and taught him to be more patient."

Treating elderly patients, some with dementia, at the Camp Hill Veterans Memorial Building also provided valuable lessons.

"You learn to correlate life and health to oral health," he says. "Dental hygiene teaches you that."

### MORE THAN CLASSMATES

Reflecting on his two years in the School of Dental Hygiene, Agnivo says that he has made friends for life and that being the only male student in the class was a "special privilege".

"As dental hygiene students, we go through good and bad times together and work on each other before we treat actual patients. That involves a lot of trust and it creates a special bond between all of you. You become more than classmates."

The process of becoming a dental hygienist has given him a lot, Agnivo feels. "It goes beyond knowledge and seeing patients. It teaches you life skills and shapes you as a person."

Agnivo plans to work in Nova Scotia when he receives his license and at some point in the future return to Dal to study for his bachelor of dental hygiene degree. He is very "proud and happy" to be part of the Dal family.

"Dal is one of the best universities in Canada," he says. "It has been a privilege to study here and be a part of it." ✨



DANNY ABRIEL

PUI LI LAI

# One eye on the future

By Cheryl Bell

*When asked what the future holds for her, Pui Li Lai (DDS'20) laughs and says that's "the million dollar question".*

Far from being worried about the blank slate that she currently faces, she says that being able to explore her options is a good thing. "My degree opened a lot of doors for me. I am free to choose what happens next."

Pui Li arrived in the Faculty of Dentistry three years ago from Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia with two classmates, Khai Shuen Kuu and Justin Yeoh, from the International Medical University (IMU). Together they comprised the pioneering first cohort of dentistry students to complete their education at Dal as part of an agreement with IMU.

Malaysian students are able to study dentistry after a one or two-year pre-university program, without the need for a first degree.

So Pui Li was still only 22 and had already studied dentistry for two years when she arrived in Halifax and was faced with continuing her studies at a new university and in a new country. Everything was different in Halifax, from the climate to the food.

But dentistry was familiar territory and Pui Li feels that she has "reaped the best of both worlds". IMU provided her with a good foundation, she says, which helped to ease her transition to Dal, where she feels she has received a good education.

"The opportunity to come here has been a great learning experience in many ways," she says. Her instructors were "constructive and kind" and, despite concerns about fitting in

NICK PEARCE



with a new class, Pui Li says she has made some really good friends. "It was better than I could have ever expected," she says.

## SOMETIMES YOU STRUGGLE

Of course, it wasn't all easy, but "everything is part of learning," says Pui Li philosophically. "Sometimes you struggle."

Highlights included arriving at the Dentistry Building in 2017 to find newly renovated labs, where the three Malaysian students spent many hours perfecting their pre-clinical techniques. Rotations at the Victoria General and IWK hospitals, the school-based paediatric clinics, and the North End Community Health Centre were also popular and offered new insights.

"These experiences added another layer to our education and opened our eyes to the different career options within dentistry," says Pui Li.

While she weighs up her options now, Pui Li is "not closing the door on anything" including specializing at a later time. Her immediate

aim is to keep learning and gain as much experience and expertise as she can to "see if I have a passion for any one type of dentistry".

Having experienced the East Coast lifestyle, Pui Li is currently applying for jobs in western Canada so that she see what the other side of the country has to offer. Returning to Malaysia is also on the agenda at some point, where she will have to complete her compulsory government service to be able to practise there.

## YOU HAVE TO LOVE DENTISTRY

Upbeat about all the possibilities open to her, Pui Li says that a return to Kuala Lumpur would give her the opportunity to hone her skills with a steady supply of patients.

While Pui Li sifts through the options to unearth the answer to the "million dollar question", she remains unequivocally passionate about her choice of profession. "You have to love dentistry to practise it. It's not easy, but if you love it, that will keep you going." ♣



## AHMAD ALASHI

# A big departure

By Cheryl Bell

Ahmad Alashi (DDS'20) confesses that he was quick to get rid of his scrubs when he completed the requirements for his dentistry degree, but he happily borrowed some for the photos. Far from being eager to cast off his dental school days at Dal, disposing of his scrubs represented a bold new beginning for Ahmad: a new program, in a new country.

"I've always wanted to go away and experience something different," says Ahmad. And that is just what he has done.

In June, Ahmad wrote his US dental board exams, packed up his Halifax apartment, said good-bye to family and friends, and travelled to Salt Lake City, Utah. He is now pursuing an Advanced Education in General Dentistry (AEGD) residency—a program unique to the US—at the Roseman University of Health Science College of Dental Medicine.

### A LONG WAY FROM HALIFAX

Halifax has been home to Ahmad since 2007. He also spent eight years at Dalhousie, studying first for a BSc in microbiology and immunology and then his DDS.

Although Ahmad is thoroughly steeped in Halifax life, the road to Canada for his family was not easy. Originally from Palestine, Ahmad's grandparents fled to Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s to escape the ongoing war and unrest in the area. Both Ahmad and his younger sister were born and raised in Saudi Arabia, but citizenship in that country is difficult if your parents are foreign nationals.

"We didn't have the same opportunities as Saudi citizens," explains Ahmad. "This meant we didn't have the same access to education and it wasn't easy for us to travel. We were considered refugees and had no passports."

Ahmad's parents decided to emigrate to Canada for a better life for their family and educational opportunities for their children.

"I'm very grateful to my parents for what they did for us," says Ahmad.

### WHY DENTISTRY?

Ahmad's interest in science at school led him to consider healthcare as a profession. Like many students in this position, he considered both medicine and dentistry. In the final

reckoning, dentistry won out, chosen for its hands-on and creative aspects.

"The diversity of treatments you can perform as a general practitioner is unique to dentistry," says Ahmad, "and I really liked the idea of being part of a profession where you can help a lot of people."

His interest in the variety of treatment options dentistry offers is one of the reasons Ahmad has opted to pursue an AEGD residency. "I'll gain a lot more experience in implant dentistry and endodontics. There are lots of opportunities—it depends what you want to get out of it."

### SOMETIMES YOU KNOW

Ahmad enjoyed the atmosphere of dental school and the camaraderie of his classmates pretty much from day one.

"We were working in the sim lab within the first weeks of starting the program and I liked that we were hands-on so soon."

The atmosphere was great, too, and Ahmad enjoyed the sense of being part of a shared profession. "We were all in it together and

were able to talk about dentistry,” he says. “We also had a great time outside of the classroom.”

By second year, he knew for sure he had made the right decision to study dentistry. Of course there were frustrations along the way. Sometimes the hands-on skills, like holding a drill, developed slowly and required a lot of practice to get right.

“There’s a point at which you have a conversation with yourself and you ask yourself if you can do this for the rest of your life,” says Ahmad, looking back. “I figured I did. Sometimes you know. And at the end of the summer I was excited to get back to school.”

During his time at dental school, Ahmad had the opportunity to work on a summer research project with Dr. Johnson Cheung, an oral and maxillofacial surgery resident. The topic was the use of ketamine as a post-operative analgesic and the research involved performing a double-blinded randomized controlled trial on 134 patients.

“I’ve always enjoyed research,” says Ahmad. “You are given a question and your role is to try to come up with different ways to answer it. It forces you to look at a problem from different perspectives.”

The results of his summer research were published in the May 2019 issue of the *Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*, with Ahmad named as one of the authors.

“I was really proud to be recognized in this way,” he says.

Rotations and volunteer experiences also enriched Ahmad’s time in the Faculty of Dentistry. As an Arabic-speaker, he found his language skills and knowledge of dentistry in demand in the New Immigrant and Refugee Oral Health Clinic. In his role as interpreter, Ahmad helped to take medical histories from patients, get informed consent, and help the patients feel at ease in what Ahmad feels must be a “terrifying and overwhelming foreign environment”, particularly if you have never been to a dentist or dental hygienist before.

Ahmad also volunteered at the provincial Special Olympics and Sharing Smiles Day, both of which are aimed at highlighting the dental needs of individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities. The experience gained from these activities taught him about the dental needs of different populations and opened his eyes to the impact he could have as a dentist to improve lives.

## ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

As he prepared to leave Halifax for the next stage of his education, Ahmad admitted he found the prospect of the move a little bittersweet. After eight years at Dal—the only university he has ever known—so many friends and experiences are part of his life here. He is sorry that he didn’t get to graduate with his class and share that special moment.

“The last four years have been great. I’m

proud to be a Dal alum and I look forward to contributing to my profession and my community.”

Not surprisingly, Ahmad’s parents are proud of what he has accomplished. Meanwhile, his younger sister is currently studying microbiology and immunology at Dal.

“I guess I was a good role model,” laughs Ahmad. “But she will figure out what she likes for herself.” ☪

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## MELANIE MANSFIELD

# A moving experience

By Cheryl Bell

Melanie Mansfield (DDH'20) is from a military family, so she is no stranger to moving. But leaving her husband and two children at home in Goose Bay, Labrador, while she travelled to Halifax to study dental hygiene at Dalhousie University proved to be perhaps her most challenging adventure.

Melanie always wanted to “go to Dal and get something great”. But life intervened: she trained as a dental assistant, married early, had two children, and the family moved to a new military base every few years when her husband Joe received a new posting.

The dream of going to Dal didn't go away, however. And at the age of 34, Melanie was finally able to make it happen.

### MAKING IT HAPPEN

Melanie, Joe, and their two daughters, Emily and Lily, have lived in Goose Bay for nearly four years. Normally around this time, they would be anticipating Joe's next posting. But Emily will graduate from high school in two years, so the Mansfields will stay until then.

The family enjoys all that Goose Bay and Labrador have to offer, including dog sledding, ice fishing, and ski-doing, and they spend a lot of time at the rink, where Lily figure skates.

But there were no dental assistant jobs available for Melanie, which did not sit well with her.

“I can't sit and twiddle my thumbs,” she says. “I need to go out and do things.”

Qualifying as a dental hygienist would give Melanie more job opportunities as well as a role that offered new responsibilities and the ability to work independently.

Her first step was to find out what she needed to be able to apply to Dal. The admissions team in the Faculty of Dentistry directed her to the College of the North Atlantic in Labrador. Through a mixture of online and in-class courses, and “a lot of studying”, Melanie was able to gain the university credits she needed to be able to apply for admission to the diploma in dental hygiene program.

Melanie only applied to Dal. It was where she wanted to be. So it was quite a blow not to be accepted at first. “But I must have been near the top of the waitlist because I got a call back pretty quickly.”

The family had talked about Melanie's plan to return to school and considered what it would mean for them all. But it was still a big change for everyone.

“Joe had never been in the position of raising the girls on his own before,” says Melanie. “We don't have any family in Goose Bay and many of our friends have been transferred out. There wasn't a lot of back-up support for him.”

### TEN COURSES IN FIRST TERM

On August 27, 2018, Melanie arrived at the Faculty of Dentistry. “I walked up to take it all in,” she says. “I had this overwhelming feeling of how lucky I was.”

The feeling of good fortune was muted somewhat by the reality of the program. Faced with 10 courses first term, Melanie found it “very intense”. At the same time, she marveled at the support she received, from classmates who “became like family” to the “wonderful dental assistants who provided what you needed”.

“I loved the professors. They genuinely care about your learning,” says Melanie. You could go up to any of them—and I did—and they would listen.”

One low point in first year was physiology. “At the time, I thought this is the course that is going to take me down. It was really challenging.”

But Melanie believes that the dental hygiene program is “set up for success”. Study sessions with classmates helped and, by second year,

Melanie “understood why we have physiology as a course”.

Another blow was the discovery that the first year of the dental hygiene program contained a third term, between April and July. “I don't know how I missed that information, but I did. It meant that I had eight weeks with my family that summer rather than three months.”

But the positives won out hands-down, from the “beautiful clinic” and the quality of the teaching, to the camaraderie of classmates and some of the off-campus rotations offered.

“I really enjoyed our rotation at the North End Community Health Centre. It's a pretty special place and it gave us a sense of what real world practice would be like. I felt comfortable there.”

COVID-19 brought an early finish to the term and a speedy return to Goose Bay. Although she was happy to be home, Melanie feels that she missed something.

“In the second semester of second year, something clicks. You have your techniques down and that's when the professors give you their tips. I would have liked more of that. They are great teachers. Everything I ever wanted from the program, they delivered.”

Back in Goose Bay, Melanie found family life a bit tricky. While she was away, the girls increasingly turned to Joe for the things they needed. She wondered where she fitted in. Bizarrely, COVID-19 has helped to bring the family together by enabling them to spend more time together over meals and playing games.

### THE NEXT MOVE

Goose Bay has just five dentists and three dental offices, so Melanie has been fortunate to find a job working part-time as a dental hygienist and part-time as a dental assistant.

“I'm more valuable now,” she says. “I have knowledge of both areas, so I'll be keeping both licences.”

Looking back on her experiences over the past two years, Melanie says she sees it as a “personal triumph”. It was hard, but ultimately doable. “I'm not a quitter,” she says. “Once I put my mind to something, I usually follow through.”

She also knows that wherever the family moves next, she won't have to sit and twiddle her thumbs. ⚡

# Enriching a community

## MICHEL COMEAU BELIEVES IN ENCOURAGING FRANCOPHONE STUDENTS TO JOIN THE PROFESSION

By **Melanie Bremner**

Dr. Michel Comeau is passionate about serving his patients as a community dentist at his dental practices in Yarmouth and in his home village of Meteghan. A graduate of the Dalhousie Dentistry class of 1998, he is an enthusiastic advocate for his patients and his community at large.

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and the province-wide restrictions on dental clinics, Dr. Comeau operated the only emergency clinic in the area.

"I am amazed at how our patients coped with so little intervention," he says.

In an effort to avoid producing aerosols in his practice, Dr. Comeau worked more slowly and used different instruments—elevators and periostomes instead of a handpiece, for example.

He equates working during the pandemic to practising dentistry in the 19th century and is happy to be looking after his patients in the 21st century again.

### KEEN TO ENCOURAGE YOUNG FRANCOPHONE AND ACADIAN DENTISTS

Dr. Comeau is a proud Acadian Nova Scotian and francophone dentist. In 2017, at the age of 48, he realized he was the youngest francophone dentist in the area.

"Our people are losing their ability to receive essential services in their native tongue," he says. Dr. Comeau explains this is relevant because terminologies and meanings can get lost in translation. "It is also about the sustainability of our language and culture," he says, "French language is a key part of our Acadian culture and I strongly believe that it is worth fighting for its survival."

He decided to make a plan for the future to ensure that French-speaking dentists are an ongoing presence in his area for years to come.

"I'm not a grandfather," says Dr. Comeau, "but I look at things with my grandfather lenses—I look 20 to 30 years into the future and plan for those results."

He began by advocating for initiatives that have been successful in recruiting and retaining medical doctors to his area. He reached out to the provincial government, Dalhousie University, and Université Sainte-Anne for support. Initiatives are currently underway with these partners and others to encourage francophone students to join the profession and treat patients in rural communities.

On March 11, 2020, just before the pandemic brought major shutdowns, Dr. Comeau and Dr. Pierre-Luc Michaud, a dentist and Dalhousie Dentistry faculty member,

participated on a panel of French-speaking health professionals to share information about dentistry with Halifax students interested in the health professions.

Until these initiatives come to fruition, Dr. Comeau is concentrating on recruiting dentists from abroad to serve in south-west Nova Scotia.

"I had never planned on becoming an economic development officer and an immigration navigator," he says, "but sometimes you just do what needs to be done." He adds, "It has been a blessing to get to know all these families as it has enriched our family and our community."

In addition to recruiting dentists from abroad and creating a framework for francophone dentist recruitment here at home, Dr. Comeau has recently established a legacy gift to the Dalhousie Faculty of Dentistry to support Acadian and francophone students who are attending dental school at Dalhousie.

"If you want apples from an apple tree, the best time to plant it was 20 to 30 years ago, and the next best time is now," he says.

With the seeds of change planted, Dr. Comeau can be confident that the positive impact of his efforts will be felt for many years to come. ♡

**"I had never planned on becoming an economic development officer and an immigration navigator, but sometimes you just do what needs to be done."**



Dr. Michel Comeau (centre) outside his dental practice.



DR. LES ENNES

## Mission in Africa

Kelly Antosh explores the boundaries of dental hygiene

By Cheryl Bell

Kelly Mabey Antosh (DDH'94) already had a science degree in biology from the University of Prince Edward Island when she decided to apply to both education and dental hygiene programs at Dalhousie University. She admits that she didn't have a clear idea of what she wanted to do next, but she had a strong urge to gain a set of practical skills and to "finish as something".

Dal accepted her into the dental hygiene program immediately and she was placed on a waiting list for education. Then, two weeks before the term began, the Education Department contacted her to say that there had been an error and there was, in fact, a spot for her on the program.

She decided to stick with dental hygiene.

"I had already made peace with my decision," says Antosh, "plus I liked the idea that it was a unique health profession in that it was about oral health promotion and not just fixing things."

Antosh's career as a dental hygienist didn't begin as she hoped it would, however. After graduation, she returned home to Saint John

to practise, but she didn't enjoy the work.

"I didn't feel I was achieving my end goal and I felt let down," she explains. "One bright spot was volunteering with Big Brothers and Big Sisters, which I found meaningful."

### A CHANGE OF SCENE

Feeling that a change was needed, Antosh decided to go to British Columbia, which was experiencing a shortage of dental hygienists and encouraging applicants from outside the province to apply. Her plan was to go there for a year and take a break from her unfulfilling professional life.

Things started to change for her almost immediately. Antosh found work in Vancouver with "the best dentist I ever worked for".

One year turned into three and Antosh began to feel that "doors were starting to open" for her. She attended a Missions Fest conference in Vancouver and learned about Mercy Ships, an international humanitarian organization that uses hospital ships to deliver free healthcare services in developing countries around the world. When a ship

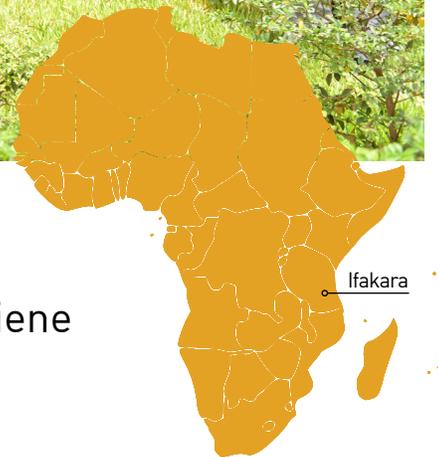
arrives at its destination, the volunteer medical teams fly in to provide their services, from surgery and women's health to ophthalmic and dental care.

In 2000, Antosh joined a ship on the west coast of Africa for the first time, living on board for three months with volunteers from 40 different countries. Working with the dental team, she treated patients who were triaged into the dental hygiene area.

### THE DESIRE TO MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE

While she found the work rewarding, Antosh found herself frustrated by the realization that she was, in many cases, providing dental hygiene care in what would be once in the lifetime of some of the patients she saw.

"I could remove the stains from a smoker's teeth, but then that person would walk away and resume their habits," says Antosh. "It didn't feel like there was a lot of lasting value in the care I could provide. So I asked if I could go into the schools and teach the children



about prevention. This made sense to me.”

Antosh returned to Africa with Mercy Ships in 2001 and 2003, which is no small undertaking even before the work begins. The healthcare workers pay to travel there, she explains, and also give up their normal incomes for the duration of their volunteer stint.

The experience spurred her to refocus her life on what really mattered to her, which was prevention. She began teaching community dental hygiene at the Vancouver College of Dental Hygiene, dividing her week between teaching and practising on a temp basis to give her the flexibility to go on outreach missions.

Another opportunity presented itself when a UPEI classmate and Dalhousie dentistry alumnus, Dr. Colin Duffy (DDS’95) contacted Antosh to ask if she would be interested in going to Tanzania through a partnership between Provision Charitable Foundation and Kindness in Action.

## THE POWER TO HELP PEOPLE

On her first trip to Ifakara in 2017 Antosh was part of a group of five who gathered data on decayed, missing, and filled teeth in 400 local children, as well as their daily diets and oral health practices. The prevalence of soda, such as Coca Cola, is a big culprit when it comes to decay and caries, she explains.

On her 2019 trip, she was able to talk to medical faculty about prevention and the possibility of employing community health workers, which are common in Africa, to teach community health following a prevention program Antosh and five of her colleagues have devised. Her ultimate goal is to see a teaching clinic created in Ifakara that would support the university and local dentists and encourage government to limit the availability of sugary sodas.

So passionate is Antosh about this topic, she is currently pursuing a master’s degree in interdisciplinary studies from Athabasca University. Her topic: the influence of big soda companies in developing countries.

Through her teaching, too, Antosh is galvanizing her students to not only understand the power of prevention, but to see the enormous potential of their profession to help people.

“I tell my students ‘don’t let the profession define who you are, but let it allow you to be who you want to be,’” says Antosh. “There is such career diversity in dental hygiene and



Opposite: The extended Canadian and Tanzania team that made the two-week clinic happen in Ifakara in September 2019. Many of those kneeling are community health workers and medical students who worked with the team.

Left: Kelly Antosh entertains a baby while her mother gets dental treatment in the clinic in Ifakara 2019.

Below: The prevalence of sodas is a major contributor to the high incidence of dental decay and caries in Ifakara.

Bottom: Teaching community health workers in Ifakara in 2017 while members of the Canadian team look on.



you can travel the world with it.”

It’s advice she follows, too. One of her special interests in clinical practice is exploring how various medical conditions, such as diabetes, and oral health diseases affect each other. “It’s part of what we should be doing in our profession,” she says.

Antosh also strives to pass on the sense of responsibility she feels is inherent in the profession, something she feels she learned from Dr. Joanne Clovis, then director of the School of Dental Hygiene at Dal, who taught community oral health.

“I’ve sort of become you,” Antosh told Dr. Clovis when they bumped into one another at

a conference in Glasgow in 2009.

“I do believe it is part of our profession to do as Melinda Gates says and help our neighbours,” says Antosh. “Dental hygiene is a profession that enables you to help. We have knowledge and resources we can share.”

The arrival of COVID-19 means that the work of the dental teams is currently on hold. But Antosh is still focused on her work there.

“The pandemic might change how we provide dental treatment in Africa, but it further emphasizes how important it is for us to empower the local people to take the lead in prevention.” ↴

# The duty of global citizens

## PROVIDING ORAL HEALTH CARE IN TANZANIA

By Cheryl Bell

In September 2019, long before COVID-19 upended our lives, Dr. Ben Davis, dean of the Faculty of Dentistry, flew from Canada to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. From there, he traveled by bush plane to Ifakara, a small rural community situated on a lush plain surrounded by mountains. The change in scene was so dramatic, he admits to a brief “where am I?” moment.

The purpose of the trip was part oral health mission and part relationship-building. After a week away, those objectives were achieved, plus a surprise connection with a Faculty of Dentistry alumna along the way.

The trip to Tanzania was a first for Dr. Davis. He had been to Tunisia in North Africa half a dozen times before with other Dalhousie oral and maxillofacial surgeons to perform cleft lip and palate surgeries and had spent time in South Africa during his residency. But Tanzania was a different experience.

### WORKING TO IMPROVE LIVES

“Through Shawna O’Hearn of the Global Health Office at Dal, I was introduced to Ken Morrison of Provision Charitable Foundation,” Dr. Davis explains. “Its mission is to improve the lives and health of citizens in Tanzania. I joined a group of oral health providers, mainly from British Columbia, who travelled to Ifakara to assist the local healthcare workers there.”

There is one faculty of dentistry in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania’s capital, which has the Sisyphean task of trying to train enough oral health professionals to meet the needs of the country’s 55 million inhabitants. St. Francis University College of Health and Allied Sciences in Ifakara has plans to develop a training program for community health workers so that they become better equipped to provide oral health care to the region’s inhabitants. Until then, international oral



BEN DAVIS

healthcare professionals travel to the area on oral healthcare and education missions.

### WHERE COKE IS CHEAPER THAN WATER

Dr. Davis explains that there is a lot of poverty in Ifakara, where the average annual income is the equivalent of \$2000 US. “It is among the most least-developed communities I’ve worked in,” he says. It also has a high incidence of dental caries.

A big problem is the ready availability of cola and other sugar-based drinks, says Dr. Davis. “Coke is cheaper than water there.”

Dr. Davis and the rest of the team landed in Ifakara, bringing with them all the equipment and supplies they would need for the two-week mission: foldable dental chairs and other mobile dental equipment, sterilizers, instruments, and over 90 Kg of supplies, all from Canada.

Conditions were rudimentary, with a temporary clinic set up in a lecture hall, where the lack of air conditioning meant that the temperatures rose well above 30 degrees Celsius, and there were frequent power outages, each of which meant a changeover to generator power. The main language was Swahili, with local doctors translating for the oral healthcare team.

The dental team focused on treating children and addressing their needs, says Dr. Davis. “Each day a bus would go to one of the many local schools and bring back a whole class.”

One dental chair handled assessments with treatments being carried out at a further five chairs. For Dr. Davis, the trip meant a return to basic dentistry, specifically extractions.

Each day, the dental team provided care to between 90 to 110 patients. Work in the clinic began at 8:30 am and finished at 5:30 pm, with a 20-minute lunch break. It was certainly busy, but Dr. Davis says the patients were “polite and grateful”. Dental pain is common in Tanzania.

### A LONGER-TERM PLAN

The temporary clinic represents the first phase of a longer-term plan for oral health in this part of Tanzania. Further phases will focus on education, oral health promotion/prevention, and the establishment of an oral health training program at St. Francis University College.

While everyone undoubtedly worked hard, the group met for dinner at the end of each day, and Dr. Davis says he enjoyed meeting new people and sharing “lots of laughs”. He was delighted to connect with Faculty of Dentistry alumna Kelly Antosh (DDH’94), who now practises and teaches dental hygiene

BEN DAVIS



“The temporary clinic represents the first phase of a longer-term plan for oral health in this part of Tanzania.”



in Vancouver (see p. 18-19). She is also a regular visitor to Tanzania and is heavily involved in developing the Ifakara oral health outreach program.

## WE ARE GLOBAL CITIZENS

Satisfying as it was to know that around 1000 people had received dental care in the two weeks the dental team was in Ifakara treating patients, there was also the knowledge that they were, as Dr. Davis says, “only scratching the surface of the problem”.

Although the pandemic has slowed progress for the time being, Dr. Davis says that he plans to return to Tanzania to use Dalhousie’s experience and knowledge to help St. Francis University College develop an oral healthcare

program. He would also like to be involved in conversations with the Tanzanian government about the ready access to sugary drinks.

“They are the root cause of so many dental problems there,” says Dr. Davis. “Prevention is the key and that means taking action to change behaviour.”

Dr. Davis also returned to Canada with a sense of responsibility. “We are global citizens. As Canadians and as healthcare professionals, we are in a privileged position and should give back globally. It is my hope that we can speed up the process by which both oral healthcare and education help to reduce the high incidence of caries, pain, and oral health disease in the Ifakara area.” ♣

# Responding to COVID-19 around the world

By Melanie Bremner

The COVID-19 pandemic has united the world with one common experience and touched or changed virtually every aspect of our daily lives. For those who are unable to work from home, like dentists and dental hygienists, these changes are more pronounced.

We checked in with a few Dalhousie Faculty of Dentistry alumni living around the world to see how COVID-19 has affected their lives and were surprised to find some far-reaching common threads.

Dr. Abdul Alkahmees (MSc Perio '19) currently lives in his home country of Kuwait and practises in a large, government-run clinic with other specialists. The clinic where he works was closed during the pandemic, although it treated emergency cases and those requiring follow-up care after recent procedures.

Abdul and his colleagues alternated shifts to limit the number of patients in the clinic at one time, which meant for two weeks a month he was not practising.

It was not ideal, but Abdul felt well prepared to adjust to the changing circumstances and offer support to his colleagues. He explains: "I credit all my instructors at Dalhousie who ensured that I was confident to enter this field, adapt as needed, and gain the respect of my colleagues so early."

Dr. Amanda Hill (DDS '08) had to close her New Glasgow practice for several weeks when the Nova Scotia chief medical officer of health, Dr. Robert Strang, suspended dental services at all dental offices across the province in March.

During her enforced stay at home, Amanda made the most of her time by diving into research on personal protective equipment and staying up-to-date on the new regulations.

Amanda shares Abdul's sentiment that the dentistry community was well positioned to accommodate the new COVID-19 protocols. "Infection control was already a huge part of our day and comes naturally to us," said Amanda. "We are used to wearing masks all day, so the transition to additional personal protective equipment isn't too hard for us."

One of the new challenges in Amanda's practice since reopening concerns the patient

experience. "Our office has a focus on being warm and welcoming," she explains. "We are having to work harder now to convey those feelings in the new world of gowns, face shields, and masks."

Holly Johnson (DDH '13) is a dental hygienist currently working in Queenstown, New Zealand. Since her return to work, she has noticed that patients have a renewed appreciation for preventive oral healthcare. "We have been fully booked as patients have realized the importance of getting dental treatment completed to prevent emergencies," she says.

Holly also had to stop seeing patients when New Zealand went into lockdown and now is adapting to very similar infection control protocols as Abdul and Amanda. All three

shared that they have been participating in online continuing education to enhance their skills in this area and others.

Holly says that she and her colleagues stayed in touch with weekly Zoom calls throughout the shutdown. Amanda also feels that the profession has stuck together and supported one another throughout this time.

From Canada to New Zealand and Kuwait, there seems to have been no lack of community and professional support for one another during the pandemic shutdowns in each country. Now, as many oral health care professionals continue to adjust to new protocols and procedures and treat their patients safely, that sense of professional support remains. We all were—and continue to be—in this together. 📌



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# More than child's play: paediatric dentistry in a pandemic

By Cheryl Bell

Drs. Evan Shaw, Tom Raddall, Lindsay James, Tracy Doyle

What began as a normal Dalhousie University paediatric dentistry residency for Lindsay James (DDS'19) and Tom Raddall (DDS'19) was turned on its head by the arrival of COVID-19. While many students and residents across Canada had their educational experience cut short by the pandemic, Lindsay and Tom not only found themselves busier than ever, but also benefiting from a unique learning experience.

Lindsay and Tom joined the IWK dental department as paediatric residents in June 2019 and began the summer by carrying out new patient examinations, recalls, sedations, and gaining a growing amount of operating room experience. By the autumn, they were rotating through all the different departments of the hospital.

## A HISTORY OF WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Both Tom and Lindsay have what Tom describes as a “strong interest” in providing dental care to children and adults with special needs. This interest was developed, in part, through volunteer opportunities with Sharing Smiles Day, the Special Olympics, and the I Am Potential program and paediatric rotations during dental school at Dalhousie University.

Lindsay says she has always been involved with children through sports and summers spent working on research projects with Dr. Tracy Doyle, director of the Dalhousie paediatric dentistry undergraduate curriculum, at the IWK. Tom had also had opportunities to work with children through summer jobs. Both of them saw the paediatric GPR as way to gain more experience in treating children and special needs patients before deciding whether to specialize in paediatric dentistry.

## PROVIDING CARE TO MANY PATIENTS

The IWK Health Centre is the only paediatric hospital in the Maritimes. It treats patients from all over Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island with many different medical conditions.

Dr. Doyle explains that in the dental department, the children they treat are a split between those who are healthy with cavities and need specialist care and those with special healthcare needs who receive ongoing dental care in the paediatric clinic.

“Many of the patients we see have complex medical conditions—heart conditions or cancer, or those who have had organ transplants and are immuno-suppressed—and are therefore at high risk of becoming very ill as a result of poor dental health. These patients must have medical

clearances, including from dentistry, before undergoing surgery or chemotherapy. This is an important part of our role as dentists in the hospital,” Dr. Doyle explains.

Lindsay says that through working closely with the paediatric dentists, she has learned how to “manage these patients and become more informed about diagnosis and treatment”.

## IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

When COVID-19 struck, everything changed and a quick transition was needed. The dental department stopped providing elective care to patients and began to handle emergency and trauma cases only. Far from being sidelined, Tom and Lindsay found themselves essential members of the team, alternating 24-hour on-call stints and working alongside the paediatric dentists to provide urgent and emergency care.

“We are probably more on call than most GPR residents at other hospitals in Canada,” says Tom.

Dr. Doyle says that Lindsay and Tom “embraced the incredible learning opportunity presented by this unprecedented time. They’ve been part of the team as we’ve worked through this together.”

The shift to urgent and emergency care meant a lot more time spent on the telephone, however. “Although we are seeing fewer patients,” says Tom, “we are making more phone calls to dentists to triage patients and to families to explain the new protocols and procedures. Parents are more

anxious, so we find we need to take more time to talk with them.”

“I have been continually impressed by Tom and Lindsay’s professionalism and work ethic as they navigate the changes to our residency program brought on by the pandemic,” says Dr. Evan Shaw, director of the paediatric dentistry general practice residency program. “They have truly risen to the occasion and have continued to provide exceptional care to our patients.”

Both Lindsay and Tom see the experience they are gaining during the pandemic as positive, despite the long hours. They feel that they have a voice in decisions made around the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other protocols.

If they have one regret it is that the PPE makes them look scarier to children. “Normally I’d wear a shark pin on my scrubs and use that to break the ice with the kids,” says Tom.

Tom and Lindsay’s year at the IWK—which will come to an end this month—has also taught them something very important about themselves: they both want to specialize in paediatric dentistry. In July they began the Pediatric Dentistry Residency Program at the Boston Children’s Hospital and Harvard School of Dental Medicine under the direction of another Dalhousie Dentistry alumna, Dr. Isabel Chase (DDS’00).

Thanks to the experience they have gained by working through the pandemic, Lindsay and Tom feel well prepared for what lies ahead. ⚡

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# Annual Giving Report

The Faculty of Dentistry is extremely grateful for the generosity of our alumni, friends and organizations that support our Faculty and Dalhousie University. The following is a list acknowledging those who have made financial contributions between April 2019 and March 2020. We sincerely appreciate your support. We would also like to thank our donors who requested to remain anonymous.

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**1985**

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**1986**

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**1987**

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Donna Samson

**1992**

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**1993**

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**1997**

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**1998**

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**1999**

Andrea McAllister

**2001**

Stacy Barrett  
Wendy Stewart

**2005**

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**2006**

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**2007**

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**2018**

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## DENTAL HYGIENE CLASS GIVING – BACHELOR

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Arminiu Klein, DDS'60  
Earle MacDonald, DDS'67  
Wallace MacKeigan, DDS'59  
Gerald Turner, DDS'60

If you would like to honour the memory of someone noted on this list by donating to the Gifts and Memorial Scholarship Fund, please contact Victoria Hamilton at 902.497.6825 or victoria.hamilton@dal.ca, or donate online at [www.giving.dal.ca/dentistry](http://www.giving.dal.ca/dentistry).

## DID YOU KNOW?

New digital dentistry equipment and software will transform teaching and learning in the Faculty of Dentistry. If you would like to join alumni and friends who have chosen to support this exciting and ambitious project, please contact Victoria Hamilton at 902.497.6825 or [victoria.hamilton@dal.ca](mailto:victoria.hamilton@dal.ca) for more information.

# The dawn of digital dentistry

By Cheryl Bell

It is impossible for Dr. Bob Loney to contain his excitement about digital dentistry and what it will mean for teaching, learning, and patient care in the Faculty of Dentistry.

“This is a game changer,” he says. “Digital dentistry will fundamentally change the way we all practise dentistry. It’s huge.”

The revolution in dentistry began in 1985 when the first rudimentary commercial digital systems became available, eliminating the need for physical impressions, which many patients find uncomfortable. Since then, the field has expanded rapidly.

## WHAT THE TECHNOLOGY CAN DO

Hand-held wands with embedded cameras can now scan the mouth from many different angles, making analogue impressions a thing of the past. These hand-held scanners make it possible to create accurate 3D models and fabricate restorations. Cone beam computed tomography (CBCT), an imaging technology, can be combined with 3D printing to produce templates to improve the accuracy of implant placement. Crowns and restorations can be produced using CAD/CAM mills instead of traditional casting and porcelain technologies.

Digital technology will ultimately mean the end of gypsum, cast storage, and articulators. Techniques and procedures that students have been taught for many years will soon be obsolete. Equipment will get smaller and treatments and processes will become faster and more efficient. Digital dentistry is also environmentally friendly, requiring fewer disposable materials than traditional techniques.

Software associated with digital dentistry can help students learn more effectively. “When students come into the lab to practise on their own without faculty supervision,”

says Dr. Loney, “they sometimes just get better at making their previous mistakes. The computer software will give them instant and objective visual feedback on their work, so they can see where they are going wrong and correct their mistakes.”

## THE TIME IS NOW

Dr. Loney and his group have been watching the developments in digital dentistry unfold and carefully planning their next steps. They have tested equipment for the past six years and believe the “time is right” to invest in the equipment.

“Prices have gone down and the equipment has matured,” says Dr. Loney. “We also have all the supports in place—a modern clinic, a new simulation lab, and a CBCT scanner—to make the best use of new digital equipment and prepare students for the future.

Dr. Loney points out that many professional practices have already started to invest in digital equipment. “The National Dental Education Board will also be holding fully digital exams in the near future. Our students will need the skills for analyzing virtual 3D models to be prepared for those exams.”

## THE FUTURE IS DIGITAL

The potential impact of digital dentistry on student learning, patient care, and teaching is enormous and the Faculty has plans to fully integrate digital dentistry into the curriculum as soon as possible.

“We know from our alumni that they are watching us and waiting for us to help them find a system that works well,” says Dr. Loney. “Thanks to our research and planning, I believe we have the potential to be a leader and centre of excellence for digital dentistry in North America.” †



Dr. Kirk Preston (right) with Dr. Ben Davis, dean of the Faculty of Dentistry in the Dr. William Murphy Dental Clinic at Dal.

## A donor's support

By Simon Couper

The next generation of dentistry students graduating from Dalhousie’s Faculty of Dentistry will be better equipped to embrace the digital technologies reshaping their industry, thanks to a \$50,000 gift from Dr. Kirk Preston (DDS’95).

Dr. Preston says the strength of the clinical experience at Dalhousie was a drawcard for him as a student and remains vitally important for students today. He believes Dalhousie is taking the right steps to equip students, describing digital dentistry as the “next big thing for the profession”.

“The Faculty of Dentistry has put a lot of time and effort into researching and finding the right fit of technology for its students; I’m really pleased to be able to support this endeavour,” Dr. Preston says.

“As a result of Dalhousie’s investments, students will be exposed to different technological platforms, discover which platforms work best for them, and confidently enter the world of digital dentistry when they graduate.”

In addition to leading two prosthodontics practices in New Brunswick, Dr. Preston remains active in industry governance bodies and scholarly work, keeping current with best practices and the changing needs of patients and students alike.

He says digital technologies will radically improve patient experiences by speeding up and simplifying clinical procedures, while also making information easier to share at every stage of a patient’s journey.

“We’re incredibly grateful to Dr. Preston for supporting this very important initiative,” Dr. Loney says. “Gifts like this make a big difference to the experience of our students and, ultimately, to the experience of patients.” †

## YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

The Faculty of Dentistry aims to raise approximately \$600,000 to purchase a milling unit and 14 intraoral scanners with software, which will be used in the simulation lab and clinics.

To donate to this campaign, please contact Victoria Hamilton, 902.497.6825 or victoria.hamilton@dal.ca.

# Dean's List

Congratulations to our alumni, faculty, and staff who continue to receive awards and recognition for their work and contribute to the fields of dentistry and dental hygiene. If you have any news items or story ideas to share, please send them to [alumni.dentistry@dal.ca](mailto:alumni.dentistry@dal.ca).

## ALUMNI

**Dr. Simardeep Hundal** (DDS'11) delivered food to Northwood Care Home staff to show support for their hard work during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Dr. Natalie Archer** (DDS'01) collaborated with Myant Inc. to develop a new line of personal protective equipment designed to address the risks that dental professionals face.



**Dr. Chad Avery** (DDS'12) has been installed as the NSDA president for 2020-21.



**Dr. Carlie Lemoine** (DDS'05) has taken over from Dr. Joy Carmichael as the New Brunswick Dental Society president.

**Dr. Ed Spracklin** (DDS'50) and his wife Lorraine celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on July 29.

**Dr. Erin Hennessy** (DDS'04) received the NSDA's Community Service Award.

**Dr. Mark Sutherland** (DDS'02) received the NSDA's T.D. Ingham Volunteer Award.

**Dr. Kevin Walsh** (DDS'90) received the Dr. P.S. Christie Award for Distinguished Service from the NSDA.

## FACULTY

**Dr. Ferne Kraglund** is the recipient of the 2020 W.W. Wood Award for Excellence in Dental Education.

**Dr. Debora Matthews** received the NSDA Award of Excellence for 2020. She is also the recipient of an Alberta Dental Association and College Service Award, which is awarded annually to a dentist outside Alberta for their dedicated service to the public and to the dental profession.



**Wendy Stewart** (DDH '01) has been named president-elect for the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association and will take up her new role in October 2020.

**Dr. Richard Price** was the recipient of the IADR Peyton Skinner award for 2019. This award recognizes a scientist who has made outstanding contributions to innovation in dental materials during their career.

An article written by a team from the School of Dental Hygiene, "YouTube videos as health decision aids for the public: An integrative review" was selected as the winner of the CJDH Research Award for the Best Published Literature Review in Volume 53. **Prof. Kim Haslam** was the lead author. Co-authors included **Profs. Heather Doucette, Shauna Hachey, Denise Zwicker, and Dr. Martha Smith Brilliant.**



**Dr. Brendan Leung** is one of this year's recipients of a New Frontiers in Research Fund for his project, 'An avatar for every tumour'.

The competition provides grants of up to \$125,000 a year for two years for teams of two or more researchers.



The retirement of **Dr. Yung Hua Li**, associate professor in the Department of Applied Oral Sciences, was marked in February 2020.

**Prof. Shauna Hachey** has been named co-lead, together with Dr. Rebecca Affoo from the Faculty of Health, of the Healthy Populations Institute (HPI) flagship project, putting 'Oral Health is Health into Action'. This is one of five flagship population health projects on which HPI will concentrate its efforts over the next 3-5 years.



**Dr. Leigha Rock**, director of the School of Dental Hygiene, has been cross-appointed to the Faculty of Medicine's Department

of Pathology. She was also recently selected as one of six "Young Leaders of Tomorrow" by the Global Oral Cancer Forum in Edinburgh, Scotland.

## STAFF



**Juliette Thomas** is this year's NSDA Don Pamenter Friend of Dentistry award winner.

**Eileen Brown** joined the Dean's Office on October 15, 2019 as the administrative secretary for Academic Affairs.

## In Memoriam

The Faculty of Dentistry was saddened by the loss of Dr. Sharieh Faghihi on January 8, 2020. She was a passenger on Ukraine International Airlines flight 752, which crashed near Tehran, Iran. Dr. Faghihi graduated from the Faculty of Dentistry in 2016 and returned to teach in the Department of Periodontology in 2017.

# Helping ICU heroes with oral health care kits

By Cheryl Bell

A UK-based project gave them the idea and Dr. Rebecca Affoo and Prof. Shauna Hachey from the Healthy Populations Institute (HPI) thought it could be done in Nova Scotia, too: to assemble and distribute oral healthcare bundles to help intensive care unit nursing staff care for their patients, particularly those on ventilators.

The aim of the project, Dr. Affoo explains, is to support front-line workers in Nova Scotia hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic. “We want to thank them and help them in the care of their patients in a convenient way. They are the heroes of our community.”

Across the province there are 140 ICU beds, which could rise to 190 beds in the event of a second wave of COVID-19 infections.

Intubated patients are at increased risk of bacterial growth in the mouth. Oral tubes keep the mouth open, which often worsens oral dryness. A lack of saliva may lead to increased bacteria growth in the mouth, which can be aspirated into a patient’s lungs, as well as cause a host of tooth, gum, and mouth problems.

## A CONVENIENT KIT OF TOOLS AND INFORMATION

“The idea is that the oral health care bundles will contain everything the ICU staff need in one convenient package that can then be used to improve the quality of life for ICU patients,” says Prof. Hachey. “Some of those patients may have COVID-19, but daily mouthcare for intubated patients is important, regardless of the circumstance.”

The HPI team’s first step was to contact Dr. Craig Dale at the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto. He and other researchers from Toronto have produced an oral health care guide for mechanically ventilated patients, an ICU mouth care routine poster, and a QR code link to an instructional video. These items are key components in the oral health bundles the HPI team has assembled.

The HPI team also approached companies to obtain the other items needed to complete the kits. These include a soft bristle toothbrush with a cover to guard against the transmission of infection, dry mouth mouthrinse, gel for mouth sores, and lip moisturizer. No toothpaste is included with the kits because it poses an aspiration risk.

“We are grateful to the companies that stepped up to provide supplies for the bundles, including Duckish, a local company that provided 200 full-size lip balms, Oral Science, which provided the toothbrushes, toothbrush covers and Gengigel, and GSK for the Biotène mouthrinse,” says Prof. Hachey.

The HPI team worked with the NS Health Authority’s Partners for Care to deliver the Oral Health Bundles to hospitals around the province. The North End Community Health Centre was also a partner in the project. †



“Daily mouthcare for intubated patients is important, regardless of the circumstance.”





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