Down to the wire: One student’s journey into residency

flourish with the advent of television shows such as “Extreme Makeover,” where viewers watch as doctors, dentists and physical therapists drastically improve an individual’s physical appearance. As evident from the response of the program participants, these makeovers yield enthusiasm and markedly higher self-confidence levels. As a reflection of American television, parents are seeking orthodontic therapy for their children to improve smiles and self-esteem. Parents themselves are undergoing treatment with products such as Invisalign® and ceramic brackets without looking like they have “metal mouths.” The AAO estimates that more than 1 million adults per year are receiving treatment from orthodontists (who are members of the AAO) in the United States and Canada.¹

I was no different. My personal interest in studying orthodontics originated during my own orthodontic treatment. As a senior in high school, I discovered that I had a variety of subjects such as infectious disease of small-group learning. It was an interesting and effective way to learn. My eight-student group discussed cases presenting with a variety of subjects such as infective endocarditis, micromechanical retention of composite and crown preparation principles (to name a few). Each student was responsible for researching a given topic, composing a report based on the directed research and then sharing it with the group both via electronic document and e-mail.

While USC has no class rank, a grade point average was given based on performance in these small group case studies and on exam performance. Small-group discussions were much more interactive than lectures and, therefore, better facilitated the learning process. Reflecting back, PBL deepened my understanding of the educational material and was extremely advantageous in my preparation for Part I National Board Dental Exam (NBDE). The NBDE Part I was a test of my motivation and determination. Upperclassmen advised me that competitive orthodontic residency applicants generally score in the 95th percentile or higher. The pressure was on. Thanksgiving marked the beginning of an arduous period of constant studying, and so began the trying eight months ahead. Juggling three pre-clinical labs and PBL sessions and spending the remainder of my time at the library brushing up on the Krebs’ cycle and renal pathology daunted me.

After eight long months, the day of the exam finally arrived. Butterflies fluttered in my abdomen, and tiny beads of sweat formed on my forehead walking through the doors into the exam room. Take a deep breath and relax. Just breathe.

After achieving a successful National Boards score, the hardest part should have been over. Wrong. Another exam required for consideration by many orthodontic programs is the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), a test that evaluates a candidate’s skills in math, reading and writing and which required as much preparation as the NBDE.

Becoming involved in leadership activities and volunteering my time to better the neighboring South Los Angeles community were very important to me. USC hosts the “Ayuda Clinic,” which is one of the community outreach programs that provide free dental care to children living in underserved areas within Los Angeles and Orange counties. One Saturday per month, dental and pre-dental students from USC administer clinics at various venues, such as at elementary schools, community centers and assisted-living communities. Inside, the clinic is organized into various stations: diagnosis, radiology, anesthesia and rubber dam, operative, “the pit” for supplies and sterilization. Several times throughout the year, Ayuda travels to an international site. Over the past seven years, USC faculty and students have treated nearly 9,000 people from Belize, Mexico, Costa Rica and Guatemala.⁴ It was at an Ayuda clinic where I proudly performed my very first dental procedure — a sealant. Students gain a great deal of dental experience by volunteering for these clinics; many students administer their first injection, which can be very daunting. Such extracurricular dental school projects are instrumental for improving the student’s confidence, ability and dexterity. That sealant and injection would lead me to greater success as dental school continued.

I am currently beginning my fourth year of dental school, and the entire curriculum involves rotations and treating patients in the clinic atmosphere. Extracurricular activities and student government consume the majority of my time, and the need for a punctual graduation still looms. USC’s didactic program prepares its students to be excellent clinicians, and it is clearly evident why — the clinical requirements are extremely demanding. USC has an admirable philosophy: Students should be competent general dentists before they can become great specialists. With overseeing comprehensive patient care, participating in abundant community activities and taking advantage of research opportunities, the remaining time surely will pass quickly.

The newest application cycle has already begun. Balancing time working in clinic, being involved in extracurricular activities and applying to various externships leave me with a very demanding schedule. As I apply, I hope to one day join the prestigious community of doctors who specialize in orthodontics.

References

About the author
Ms. Donna N. Lieu will graduate in 2008 from the University of Southern California, School of Dentistry (DDS). Her professional accomplishments include: USC Class Council and Academic Committee and Secretary of Communications for 2008 as well as volunteer, Ayuda Dental Outreach Program. She graduated from University of California, San Diego (B.S.), with a major in biochemistry and cell biology, and orthodontic externships at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Va., and University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles. As a student at the USC School of Dentistry, Ms. Lieu received the following awards and honors: Dean’s List, 2005 and 2006, Order of Omega Greek Honor Society, 2005 and the A. E. Ardis Scholarship from UCSF. She is fluent in Vietnamese and Spanish and enjoys photography, fiction novels, cooking, exercise and dance classes.

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Dr. Malcolm Meister, chair of the Department of Orthodontics, at the Nova Southeastern University Dental School, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., received the Distinguished Service Award from the New York University College of Dentistry Orthodontic Alumni Society.

The award was presented July 26 in New York City at the graduation ceremony dinner for the postgraduate orthodontic residents at NYU. Dr. Elliott Moskovitz, president of the Orthodontic Alumni Society, stated that the distinguished service award is the highest honor that can be bestowed upon a member of the alumni society. Dr. Moskovitz also stated that: “Dr. Meister has demonstrated a lifetime achievement in clinical orthodontics and education. He is a role model for all of us in integrity and excellence in orthodontics and dentistry.”

Dr. Meister “birthed” the Department of Orthodontics at Nova Southeastern University and, as its first chair, gained national and international respect for his efforts.

Dr. Malcolm Meister graduated from the NYU College of Dentistry in 1955. After spending two years in the U.S. Air Force, he returned to NYU College of Dentistry Department of Orthodontics and graduated in 1959 with a certificate in orthodontics. Dr. Meister also holds a law degree and is an expert in dental jurisprudence.

Dr. Meister, on receiving this award, commented on the importance of his orthodontic teachers at NYU for helping to shape his fundamental and guiding philosophies in orthodontic practice and teaching during his lifetime.

Rotaplast honors
Robert L. Boyd,
D.D.S., M.Ed.

by Dennis J. Tartakov, D.M.D., M.Ed, Ph.D., Editor-in-Chief, Ortho Tribune

Rotaplast International, Inc., a non-profit, humanitarian organization that provides free reconstructive surgery for cleft lips and palates in children, honored University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry faculty member Dr. Marie Tolarova with its Distinguished Service Award. The award recognizes Dr. Tolarova for her 10 years of service with Rotaplast and the school’s participation in programs to prevent and treat cleft lip and palate in children throughout the globe. Rotaplast presented the award during its annual recognition dinner at the Hotel Monaco on March 31.

“That same evening, our department of orthodontics and our craniofacial genetics division also received a plaque for support of Rotaplast,” Dr. Tolarova said. “It is wonderful to be recognized for our efforts to prevent and treat cleft lip and palate.”

Dr. Tolarova, professor and executive director of Pacific’s Craniofacial and Cleft Prevention Program, has led the dental school’s efforts to help individuals with cleft lip and palate.

Dr. Robert L. Boyd, Professor and Chair of the Department of Orthodontics at the University of the Pacific, established the curriculum for his postgraduate orthodontic residents to treat underprivileged children with orofacial clefts. Dr. Boyd’s postgraduate orthodontic program is the only program in the country to include such an opportunity for its residents.

Dr. Tolarova, who has taken part in 57 Rotaplast missions and played a key role in initiating the curriculum protocol with Dr. Boyd, is a board-certified pediatrician and board-certified medical geneticist. She has published a book on epidemiology of orofacial clefts, has published numerous papers, contributed to several books on cleft prevention and has lectured throughout the world.

Dr. Tolarova is currently a member of the American Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Society, the International Association for Dental Research and the American Association of Human Genetics.

Thanks to Dr. Tolarova’s influence, Pacific’s students, residents and faculty have participated in more than 85 missions since 1999.

Dr. Galang joins faculty at University of Illinois at Chicago

New University of Illinois at Chicago, College of Dentistry faculty member Dr. Maria Therese S. Galang is a third-generation Filipino dentist — her grandfather was one, and her mother is an orthodontist.

Her initial plan was to work with her mother in the Philippines after graduation and eventually take over her practice. During her residency, however, some opportunities in academia and private practice arose, which led her to stay in Chicago.

Dr. Galang is joining the College’s Department of Orthodontics, where she is predoctoral orthodontics course director, co-course coordinator for the first-year orthodontic residents’ technique course and clinical instructor.

“I want to give [orthodontic residents] enough information to critically think and take the initiative to learn and discover more,” Dr. Galang said. “I want to inspire them to work as team players in preparation to lead their own staff teams when they go out and establish their practices. I also intend to be a good mentor.”

Dr. Galang earned her MS from the College in 2004, a Certificate in Orthodontics from the College in 2007 and her DMD from the University of the Philippines in 2000.

“I chose to combine academia and clinical practice, in order to make a difference and contribute something significant to my profession,” Dr. Galang said. “What better way than to become a teacher and train future dentists and orthodontists the way my professors inspired and molded me?”