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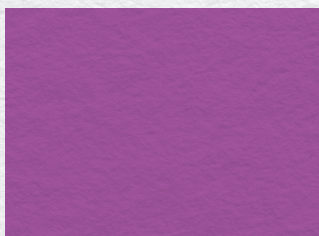
DENTAL  
MEDICINE



# Preparation



**Rutgers School of Dental Medicine**  
2024–2025 Annual Report





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**mission**

To improve health and quality of life by preparing the next generation of oral healthcare professionals and scientists, providing the highest quality, evidence-based oral healthcare serving New Jersey and communities worldwide, and advancing health through discovery and innovation.

A Message from the Dean

As the Dean of Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM), I'm often asked what sets our institution apart from other dental schools across the country. While there are many distinguishing features I could highlight, one consistently rises to the top: our clinical program.

RSDM is New Jersey's largest provider of oral healthcare—a distinction that speaks not only to the breadth of our reach but also to the depth of our impact. Our clinics are more than just places where care is delivered; they are dynamic, hands-on learning environments where students gain unparalleled experience under the guidance of expert faculty and supportive staff. Every procedure is a teaching moment. Every lesson reinforces our commitment to excellence. Every patient interaction is an opportunity

to instill compassion, precision, and professionalism.

Unlike many dental schools, our clinical training requirements go well beyond the standard curriculum. Our students treat more patients, perform more procedures, and graduate with a level of clinical confidence and competence that is truly exceptional. Simply put, they are prepared.

It is with immense pride and gratitude that I witness the extraordinary work taking place each day at our flagship clinical and teaching facility in Newark, our faculty practices in Newark and New Brunswick, and our community clinics in Northfield and Somerdale. Everywhere—in the clinic, the classroom, and the research lab—our community embodies the highest standards of dentistry driven by a shared dedication to improving lives and advancing



the field. It is my pleasure to introduce some of these outstanding individuals to you through this annual report.

Warm regards,  
**Cecile A. Feldman, DMD, MBA**  
Dean and Distinguished Professor  
Rutgers School of Dental Medicine

A Message from the Chancellor

Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) stands as a model of clinical excellence, academic rigor, and community service within Rutgers Health and beyond. As the largest provider of oral healthcare in New Jersey, RSDM is not only shaping the future of dentistry, it is transforming lives across the Garden State and beyond.

With a mission rooted in equity and compassion, RSDM delivers care where it's needed most. Programs like the Holocaust Survivors Program, Vet Smiles, and Give Kids a Smile Day reflect the school's dedication to historically underserved communities. And that dedication knows no borders. Through annual service trips to the Dominican Republic and the Indian Health Services clinic in South Dakota, RSDM students and faculty extend their reach to populations that would otherwise go without care—living out our core belief that everyone deserves access to quality oral healthcare.

These initiatives reflect the school's mission of improving health and quality of life for all people, which is rooted in world-class clinical education. From day one, students are immersed in advanced training that blends scientific knowledge with technical mastery. In pre-clinic, they gain early exposure to dental procedures. In their third and fourth years, students provide real-world patient care in state-of-the-art clinics, working under the mentorship of renowned faculty. This hands-on experience, paired with a rigorous curriculum, ensures that graduates don't only meet the standards of the profession, they set them. RSDM prepares students to lead with skill, empathy, and purpose.

The future of oral healthcare depends on clinicians who are both highly trained and deeply compassionate. At RSDM, that future is already here. Whether serving communities in Newark or villages halfway around the world, our students and graduates are making an indelible



mark—delivering care with integrity, advancing health with purpose, and exemplifying what it means to be part of Rutgers Health.

Sincerely,  
**Brian L. Strom, MD, MPH**  
Chancellor, Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences  
Executive Vice President for Health Affairs at Rutgers University





Assistant Professor of Restorative Dentistry Samantha Wolff (center) with students Benjamin Brudner (right) and Karen Eren (left) at the school's main clinic.

# Clinically Distinct

**B**enjamin Brudner still remembers the moment his patient looked in the mirror and smiled—really smiled—for the first time in years. The patient had been living without a full set of teeth, struggling to eat, speak, and feel confident in public. But that day, Brudner, a third-year dental student at Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM), handed him his denture.

That moment wasn't just a milestone for the patient but also for Brudner.

"He was the first person I delivered a complete denture to, and it will live in my head indefinitely," he said. "It's amazing how much we do here. I have friends and peers at other schools, and what we do [in the clinic] is like night and day."

This emphasis on clinical training at RSDM is deliberate. As New Jersey's largest oral healthcare provider and only dental school, RSDM occupies a unique place in the state with a dual mission of delivering high-quality care to the community and preparing students to become exceptional dental professionals. Each year, the school graduates nearly 150 students. It welcomes over 140,000 patient visits, performing more than 250,000 procedures at its central clinic in Newark as well as at its faculty practices in Newark and New Brunswick, along with its extramural clinics in Northfield and Somerdale. The school also offers special programs for veterans, patients living with HIV/AIDS, and Holocaust survivors. These expansive clinical offerings translate into rigorous training for students who often exceed national averages in competency exams and match rates. On their first attempt, nearly 100 percent of the RSDM students pass the Integrated National Board Dental Examination annually. In 2024, the school's





Senior Associate Dean Office for Clinical Affairs Michael Conte '92 (right) and Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs Nathalie Scarpa-Lota '91 (left) oversee RSDM's large clinical operations.

match rate hit 86 percent—well above the national average of 66 percent. And with those entering private practice, the placement rate climbs to 90 percent.

"Rutgers grads are well-trained clinically," said Elizabeth Clemente, chair of the Department of Dentistry and the director of the residency program at Atlantic Health Morristown Medical Center, who had overseen the residency program for almost two decades until retiring. "There're a lot of programs having trouble with students doing certain procedures," she said, due to lack of patients or clinical training limitations.

Alumna and Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs Nathalie Scarpa-Lota '91 recalled prioritizing Rutgers applicants during her time at St. Joseph's Medical Center. "I used to go through all applications and focus on the ones from Rutgers because I knew they had done more dentistry than any of the other schools," she said. "To this day, I still get phone calls from other residency directors asking about our students."

To get to that desirable level of competency, students like Brudner begin their dental journey in the pre-clinic for the first two years. "We're known for our excellent clinical training, and that begins in the pre-clinical years," said Assistant Professor of Restorative Dentistry Donald Lapine

'97, who teaches at the pre-clinical and clinical levels.

Pre-clinical education closely simulates real-world practice. Students have 24/7 access to practice procedures on mannequins, learn patient communication from faculty, get exposed to treatment planning, and transition from traditional methods to digital dentistry as they progress. Faculty rotate through the pre-clinic.

Towards the end of their second year, students begin assisting third- and fourth-year students at the clinic and get a "big"—an upper-class student mentor. This early exposure to clinical simulation and mentorship lays the groundwork for students, who enter their third year equipped with technical skills and confidence as they get their own patients to treat under the close supervision of RSDM faculty. "We get to develop a rapport with the students early on and track their progress across the four years," said Lapine.

"We are probably one of the most demanding clinical programs in the country," said Senior Associate Dean Office for Clinical Affairs Michael Conte '92, overseeing the school's clinical operations for two decades. "We have high expectations of our students, and we provide them with patients to meet those numbers."

With 420 operatories, RSDM's clinics are bustling, state-of-the-art facilities that operate year-round. Behind the scenes, a complex system of sterilization, supply management, and scheduling keeps everything running smoothly. "The key to this is the people who work here; the dental school employees are what make this a dental home," Conte said. "We remain a very strong, viable program because of our reputation and have plenty of patients walking through our doors."

That trust extends far beyond New Jersey. While most patients come from the tri-state area, some travel from as far as Detroit, Florida, and Texas for the kind of holistic care RSDM provides. Assistant Professor of Restorative Dentistry Samantha Wolff, a former New York University faculty and alumna, was struck



by the complexity of cases and quality of care at RSDM. "One of the things I love about how Rutgers treats patients is the continuity of care," she said. "The same student will help work on a case even if a patient is referred to a specialty clinic." In most institutions, pre-doctoral students do not follow their patients into a specialty clinic.

Peter Henein '18'23 has been on the side of both pre-doctoral and specialty clinics as he completed his DMD and then returned for his oral and maxillofacial surgery specialty training. "I knew from speaking to friends at other dental schools that Rutgers was a school that

gave you a lot of practical hands-on experience," he said. During his pre-doctoral training, he fell in love with oral surgery during rotations. "The patient volume and the types of procedures that we do are some of the best in the country," he said. "I did so many implants, wisdom teeth, and trauma orthognathic surgeries in residency that going into private practice was very easy." He also found mentors who not only taught dental procedures but also



skills for a dental professional like how to manage time and have a work-life balance.

Milan Patel '16, a general dentist and solo practitioner, was drawn to the school because of its clinical program, too. "I was really

impressed with just how everybody said that their clinical experience was towards the forefront," he said. After graduation, he began a general practice residency (GPR) program where he was with a classmate and two graduates from other institutions. He saw RSDM's clinical difference first-hand. "We were definitely much more prepared," he said. "We did 20 crowns prior to graduating, they did five. We did 12 dentures, they did one; so we hit the ground running, and we were doing things that they were still honing in on."

A major renovation of the pre-clinic is underway, with a new space slated to open in January 2027. The upgraded facility will expand 105 stations to 150 and transition from analog to digital, offering students a more immersive and technologically advanced learning environment as well as full-torso mannequins.







# white coat

An annual tradition, Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) Class of 2028 received their white coats as they started working towards earning DMD degrees to become dentists. This class was one of the most competitive in the school's history with a total of 3,709 applications for about 90 spots.

RSDM was one of the first dental schools in the country to have this symbolic white coat tradition. The event launched with remarks from Vice Dean Kim Fenesy and Dean Cecile A. Feldman, welcoming 91 students into the profession. The keynote speaker was a recent graduate and secretary of the RSDM Alumni Association Eric Reitmeyer '22'24 who told the students the importance of upholding the ethical professionalism that the white coat represents from their initial days as students and then throughout their careers.

"You may not be actual dentists right now, but you'll have to start acting like one," said Reitmeyer. "The white coat you

will receive today represents qualities of professionalism, humility, empathy, and trust. These are all characteristics you must possess now and after graduation." To achieve those, he told the class: "Do the right thing. While that may not sound super profound or deep, it's the best piece of advice I can share. All of you right now can differentiate what's right and wrong. Knowing what's right is different from doing what's right."

Following Reitmeyer's speech, Daniel Brigham of the Class of 2026, and Matthew Amador and Hannah Ciullo of the Class of 2025 received the school's Professionalism Award given to students displaying exemplary professional conduct.







## When Dentistry Finds You

**D**aria Borisova's parents always wanted her to be a lawyer. But life presented her with another possibility: dentistry. When her mother got into a car accident, she saw an oral and maxillo-facial surgeon erase all the signs of the event from her face.

"This inspired me," she said, adding that she also liked that dentistry combined hand skills with critical thinking to make the correct decision.

While pursuing her dental degree at Russia's oldest medical school, the Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, she discovered her real passion was in pediatric dentistry rather than oral and maxillofacial surgery. She loved treating children and special needs patients. She



enjoyed spending time with them to gain their trust and making them feel comfortable on the dental chair. She graduated with a "Red Diploma," the highest honors in Russia, and began her pediatric

dentistry residency at Moscow State University of Medicine and Dentistry. She then went on to private practice.

Life took another turn in 2021 when she had to move to the United States for political reasons. But she had no intention of leaving her career behind. Immediately upon arriving, she started looking into dental programs to get her license in the US. She set up her own dental simulation lab with a compressor and all to do pre-clinical exercises at home. She also worked as a dental assistant in a pediatric clinic in California. "What I liked was that the doctor shared some responsibility, so I didn't forget hand skills while preparing and going to school." Soon after, she received her acceptance letter to Rutgers School of Dental Medicine's (RSDM) Internationally Educated DMD Program, specially designed for students like her who had received their dental training abroad.

"Especially for me as someone who already had some experience, it was really important to find a school where I can grow as a clinician," she said. "I chose Rutgers because even before I applied to school, I've heard a lot of stories about how there's a very good clinical experience."

She switched coasts to find a supportive environment that affirmed her decision. In Russia, she explained, the curriculum was more focused on theoretical skills, and teaching was top-down rather than hands-on. "If you couldn't do something, [faculty] could come and do that for you [in Russia]. But here, they expect us to learn from our mistakes, take a step back and fix them. Professors say we are here to help you, and I really love that." She has also been enjoying stepping back into general dentistry. She has been seeing patients through RSDM's special programs, including the Vet Smiles Program and the Holocaust Survivor Program.

"I really love this experience," she said, "and understand that the world of dentistry is broader than having interactions with children because others need the same kind of compassion."

During orientation, a group of second-year students steps up to mentor the incoming class as part of the Foresight Program, which found life with the efforts of Vice Dean Kim Fenesy decades ago. Foresight leaders organize events, provide study tips, and guide the newest class starting from the first days of their RSDM journeys.



Back, left to right: Nikolaos Kokinakos, William Vidal, Nicholas Zampaglione, Shayan Roueefar, Mark Nashed

Front, left to right: Rachel Handelman, Yazmin Ortiz, Antoinette Afriyie, Sydney Moholkar, Chloe Van Duyne

## Meet Maritza Camacho from our Admissions Office

**Tell us a bit about yourself and what you do at Rutgers School of Dental Medicine.**

Originally, I started in the Office of Student Affairs and later became part of the admissions team. I currently oversee programs such as the Decision for Dentistry and Gateway. The Decision for Dentistry program introduces 75 high school students to career options in the dental profession each year. The Gateway Program has two sessions a year with a total of 40 students per session. Students are engaged in hands-on activities and various aspects of dentistry. Gateway helps students make critical decisions regarding educational and career planning.

**What do you like most about RSDM?**

My interaction with incoming, current, and graduated students. The highlight of this experience is witnessing students achieve their goals of becoming dentists as well as witnessing their growth from high schoolers to young men and women. I can never forget my first high school student who graduated from dental school in 2005.

—Joanne Jeong '25





# Emphasis on Public Health with New Programs

An old wife’s tale says mothers lose a tooth for every baby. Was that true? This question launched Stefanie Russell’s career, focusing on women’s oral health. She found some truth to the saying due to biological, behavioral, and dietary changes during pregnancy. As a dual specialist in periodontics and

public health, she continues her quest to solve common problems for many women, especially those vulnerable to poor oral health. “In public health, our emphasis is on population health as opposed to the needs of the patient sitting in the dental chair,” she explained. “We are interested in improving oral health for a certain population; my focus is on pregnant persons who may not be getting the dental health-care they need at a critical time.” She recently brought that approach to Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) for a big mission. As an associate professor of pediatric dentistry and community health, she will help

the school create academic programs in dental public health. “There are a lot of disparities in oral health,” she said. “We’re looking to train people who will be leaders in dental public health, so those who will go into academia, policy, and research.” RSDM’s first program will be an online certificate degree for dental public health and will serve as an introductory course of study aimed at training interested persons in the fundamentals of dental public health. Other programs will include a master’s program and a residency program in dental public health. She noted that only about sixteen dental public health residency programs exist in the US. Russell

will help incorporate dental public health into the pre-doctoral curriculum, too. While these programs will be new additions to the school’s expansive offerings, RSDM is a familiar place for Russell. Her father, Richard Russell, was a general dentist and taught at the school for years. It was through him that she had an intro-



duction to dentistry. After completing her DDS from Baltimore College of Dental Surgery, she pursued a periodontics residency, where she discovered an interest in public health because she could have a much bigger impact on society.

That led her to a master’s in public health from the University of Connecticut and a PhD in chronic disease epidemiology from Yale University. “I really value trying to figure out solutions for population health and what works so that more people can improve their oral health and/or benefit from dental care,” she said.

From New York University, she returned to RSDM, where she worked 25 years ago, for this new position to build dental public health programs. “It just was such a great opportunity to start something from scratch,” she said. “Not all schools are that interested in dental public health, so to have that commitment from Rutgers means a lot.” She also recognized the special place RSDM occupies in New Jersey as the state’s only dental school and largest oral healthcare provider in an urban area.

“New Jersey cities have always struggled with inequities, so I think that adding dental public health to Rutgers will be helpful for populations in New Jersey,” she said. “We plan on working with the Department of Health to develop research and education programs that can benefit people.”

# Experienced Dental Surgeon Gets Renewed Look on Dentistry

When Olusegun Olaopa got board-certified as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon in Nigeria, he felt he got what he needed to make a significant impact. He loved his work. But he soon realized his passion alone wasn’t enough with the limited resources of the country.

He decided to change his path and take his career to the US, enrolling in Rutgers School of Dental Medicine’s (RSDM) Internationally Educated DMD Program, specially designed for students trained abroad. A year into the program, his views on dentistry began to transform.

For instance, for the first time, he saw a metal-based denture. “Many of our complex prosthetic learning [in Nigeria] were theoretical at pre-doctoral level, but here you see those things written in textbooks and actually do them,” he said. Putting on dental loupes and getting a closeup view of teeth was a first, too. “[The program] makes me feel there is more to dentistry than oral and maxillofacial surgery, and it changed my perception about dentistry as a whole.”

Olaopa had chosen oral and maxillofacial surgery because it felt realistic and tangible. “You see a problem, you tackle it,” he said. “I’m a practical person and that was why I liked it, and it also comes with immediate gratification [of solving a problem].”

In Nigeria, he was the president of the Association of Resident Doctors, University College Hospital Ibadan, and the national association, leading over 16,000 medical and dental residents. “The association is the first of its kind in West Africa and perhaps Africa,” he said and added



that he wrote a book on the association’s history as it had no previous written record.

He documented other things in his career, too, like the first case of Gardner syndrome in Nigeria. “I love research,” he said. Besides oral surgery, his work extends to forensics—in which he has a master’s—and health systems for their effectiveness, especially during COVID-19.

His versatile interest expanded during the pandemic. He initially made face shields in his apartment. Then, he had a business idea: farming. He bought some land and collaborated with experts from an agricultural institute in Ibadan to start growing oil palm and plantains for wholesale.

While his business bloomed, he wanted more from his surgical career. “Many times, when I operated, I’d struggle and improvise with instruments and equipment,” he said. He observed that patients also struggled with medical coverage and access.

Frustrated, he eyed overseas and reached out to programs in the US for clinical fellowships, all of which required a US degree. So, he came to RSDM for it.

“I love it so far,” he said. The program has been challenging him as well because RSDM’s clinical requirements are much more expansive and rigorous compared to others. “Because you do a lot [of procedures], the skill comes naturally,” he said. “I think it’s one of the major strengths of the school.”



We’re looking to train people who will be leaders in dental public health, so those who will go into academia, policy, and research.

STEPHANIE RUSSELL



# craft

## Non-Opioid Pain Relievers Beat Opioids After Dental Surgery

A combination of acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) controls pain better than opioids, according to a Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) study that could change how dentists treat post-surgical pain.

The trial in more than 1,800 patients found that those given a combination of ibuprofen and acetaminophen experienced less pain, better sleep and higher satisfaction compared with those receiving the opioid hydrocodone with acetaminophen.

“We think this is a landmark study,” said Cecile Feldman, dean and lead author of the study funded by the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. “The results actually came in even stronger than we thought.”

Dentists, who rank among the nation’s leading prescribers of opioids, wrote more than 8.9 million opioid prescriptions in 2022. For many young adults, dental procedures such as wisdom tooth extraction are their first exposure to opioid medications.

“There are studies out there to show that when young people get introduced to opioids, there’s an increased likelihood that they’re going to eventually use them again, and then it can lead to addiction,” said study co-investigator Janine Fredericks-Younger, adding that

opioid overdoses kill more than 80,000 Americans each year.

To compare opioid and non-opioid pain relief, the researchers conducted a randomized trial on patients undergoing surgical removal of impacted wisdom teeth, a common procedure that typically causes moderate to severe pain. Half the patients received hydrocodone with acetaminophen. The other half got a combination of acetaminophen and ibuprofen. Patients rated their pain levels and other outcomes, such as sleep quality, over the week following surgery.

Results in *The Journal of American Dental Association* showed the non-opioid combination provided superior pain relief during the peak-pain period in the two days after surgery. Patients taking the non-opioid medications also reported better sleep quality on the first night and less interference with daily activities throughout recovery. Patients who received the

over-the-counter combo were only half as likely as the opioid patients to require additional “rescue” pain medication. They also reported higher overall satisfaction with their pain treatment.

“We feel pretty confident in saying that opioids should not be prescribed routinely and that if dentists prescribe the non-opioid combination, their patients are going to be a lot better off,” Feldman said.

The study’s size and design make it particularly notable. With participants across five clinical sites, it’s one of the largest studies of its kind. It also aimed to reflect real-world medication use rather than the tightly controlled conditions of many smaller pain studies.

“We were looking at the effectiveness – so how does it work in real life, taking into account what people really care about,” said Feldman, referring to the study’s focus on sleep quality and the ability to return to work.

The findings align with recent recommendations from the American Dental Association to avoid opioids as first-line pain treatment.

“For a while, we’ve been talking about not needing to prescribe opioids,” Feldman said. “This study’s results are such that there is no reason to be prescribing opioids unless you’ve got those special situations, like medical conditions preventing the use of ibuprofen or acetaminophen.”

Members of the research team said they hope to expand their work to other dental procedures and pain scenarios. Other researchers at the school are testing cannabinoids for managing dental pain.

“These studies not only guide us on how to improve current dental care,” said Feldman, “but also on how we can better train future dentists here at Rutgers, where we constantly refine our curriculum informed by science.” — Andrew Smith



“These studies not only guide us on how to improve current dental care but also on how we can better train future dentists here at Rutgers.”

DEAN CECILE FELDMAN





Vice Dean Fenesy Received EJI Excellence in Medicine Award as the First DMD

Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) Vice Dean Kim Fenesy was awarded the prestigious 2025 EJI Excellence in Medicine Award in the Outstanding Medical Educator category. Established in 1939, the award has never been given to a recipient with a Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) degree in any category. With the award, she also received a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from Congress.

“This year, it was really clear that Dr. Fenesy just was an incredible role model for others and that she continues to enhance her professionalism and commitment to excellence. It was a unanimous

decision,” said George F. Heinrich, a member of the selection committee and associate dean for admissions at New Jersey Medical School. “We received a lot of really wonderful nominations, and we look for someone who distinguishes themselves in many different ways beyond their titular responsibility, someone who continues to grow and develop personally.”

Fenesy earned her DMD from RSDM in 1986 and completed her periodontics specialty certificate at Boston University Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine. She returned to RSDM in 1988 and since 2001 had held numerous administrative dean positions in Academic and Student Affairs and currently serves as the school’s vice dean. For the past decade, she has been a national leader in interprofessional education (IPE) initiatives.

“I was actually very surprised and really humbled by receiving this award,” said Fenesy.

Long before IPE became a buzzword, Fenesy was advocating for collaboration among healthcare professionals in the 1990s. “I was saying we can’t be working in silos,” she explained. As a periodontist, she often saw how medications prescribed by other doctors worsened patients’ conditions due to a lack of collaborative treatment planning. This inspired her to promote teamwork and communication across many healthcare disciplines.

When Rutgers and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) merged, she played a key role in shaping interprofessional education at the new Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences. She received a \$2.5 million Health Resources and Services Administration grant to develop an interprofessional curriculum with which she created the SPICE (Special Populations Interprofessional Care Experiences) program involving seven Rutgers schools—including Social Work, Nursing, Public Health, Pharmacy, Health Professions, and New Jersey Medical School—as well as Middlesex Community College. Though the grant is over, SPICE continues to meet with the



**Fourth Year Student Recognized**

Matthew Amador of the Class of 2025 was awarded the 2025 EJI Excellence in Medicine Scholarship.

steering committee with representation from those schools, along with an annual retreat, and RSDM continues to lead the weekly cases in oral medicine and special needs for students across various schools to discuss cases to engage in interprofessional learning. Thanks to Fenesy’s efforts, RSDM’s curriculum—which integrates IPE throughout all four years—has become a national model. Moreover, Fenesy was selected to serve on the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC) national committee to work on a new set of interprofessional educational competencies used not only throughout the nation in all the health profession schools but also globally.

“She has local Rutgers Health-wide and national recognition for her role in interprofessional education,” said Vice Chancellor for Interprofessional Programs at Rutgers Health Denise V. Rodgers, who nominated Fenesy for the award. “[She has] really done a lot and advanced our reputation as an institution in the world of IPE.”

Crossing the Atlantic for RSDM Externship

Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) hosted two students from Ireland for a two-week externship in the summer. The two attendees were dental students Azra Sharif Hassan and Julian Bradley from Trinity College Dublin in Ireland. Both in their last year of school, they met RSDM faculty, spent time shadowing post-graduate residents in specialty clinics, and attended classes with third- and fourth-year students.

“[Those] gave us an insight into what dental school in the USA is truly like,” said Hassan. She was drawn to the program because she aspires to study in the US. She wanted to get a sense of the education and compare it to dentistry in Europe.

“My time at RSDM has significantly broadened my horizons and hopes for my future career in dentistry,” she said. “The exceptionally high standards of teaching and rigorous academic requirements have further solidified my determination to pursue my studies in the USA.”

She found the chance to observe different specialties rewarding, especially in periodontics, which she hopes to pursue

in the future. The attendees also met the Class of 2028 during their orientation and the White Coat Ceremony, a tradition that Hassan and Bradley didn’t have in their school.

Like Hassan, Bradley also hopes to take his career to the US after graduation but for a different reason: his American wife in New York. “I had been researching international programs for foreign-trained dentists,” he said, and his school shared this opportunity at Rutgers, a program that was already on his list.

In his two weeks, he enjoyed getting to know the faculty. “It was refreshing hearing certain thoughts and ideas from those who have been in private practice for a long time and are now teaching students,” he said. “Some of these can definitely be applicable to our own careers when starting out.”

In the short two weeks, he quickly adapted to the school and felt at home with the help of faculty, staff, and students.

“We both felt so at home,” he said. “Overall, it was a brilliant experience.”





# Brushing Away Hurdles

Ever wondered how astronauts brush their teeth? Often, they end up swallowing their toothpaste, just like children and persons with special care needs, which can harm overall health. Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) Associate Professor of Diagnostic Sciences Maxine Strickland has a healthier solution for all: MaxVac.

MaxVac is a powered toothbrush created by Strickland. Unlike a regular brush, it has both brushing and suctioning capabilities, enabling the removal of liquids from

the mouth. This is especially important for special needs patients as they might continuously ingest microorganisms during brushing that may lead to health issues such as pneumonia.

“[MaxVac] removes potentially harmful and infectious materials ... and thereby can be very useful for the elderly and disabled, in nursing or hospital settings, in dental clinics, for young children, and routine home use,” said Rutgers Office for Research Senior Manager of Technology Eusebio Pires and Licensing Manager Ryan Escolin in a joint statement.

This toothbrush was a passion project with roots in the early years of Strickland’s

career when she worked in a pediatric dentistry office and later assisted in setting up a clinic for disabled patients as a faculty at Rutgers. “That was the beginning of my experience with thinking about this type of intervention because many of the patients had swallowing difficulties,” she said, adding that many dentists used suction with brushing while brushing in the clinic. Why not combine these two in one piece of equipment, she years later thought. Through a Rutgers TechAdvance grant, she converted her idea into a handheld product with the help of engineers.

The first version of MaxVac was a snap-on to an existing toothbrush, which had a patent issued in May 2024. The second version was developed with a National Science Foundation grant as a more advanced, stand-alone powered toothbrush with specific capabilities of removing liquids from the mouth. While the patent for that is still pending, she gathered patient feedback, leading her to versions three and four, which are smaller and easier to hold.

“Honestly, I had never really thought about being an inventor,” said Strickland. “It’s been a nice, exciting venture trying to reduce some of the anxiety and give dignity to the patients.”

She plans to have the brushes first used in a hospital for neurologically impaired patients in 2026. Following that, she hopes to collaborate with a hospital, where patients with spinal cord injuries will try MaxVac. Her ultimate goal is to see MaxVac widely accessible in all stores alongside other dental products and also possibly in backpacks of hikers and spacecrafts of astronauts.

“It was exciting to think about these applications,” she said. “As a dentist, it’s encouraging and inspiring that this product can make a difference, and I’m hoping various populations can use it.”



# Bridging the Gap for Better Patient Care

Professor of Oral Medicine Mahnaz Fatahzadeh saw many cases of advanced oral cancer that arrived too late. Aware of barriers to accessing oral healthcare, she wondered what she could do to facilitate early diagnosis and reduce her patients’ pain. She found the answer in collaboration.

“I felt part of the reason patients are falling through the cracks is because there is a knowledge gap,” she said. “Even

though oral health screening is simple and takes little time to perform, it is often not a priority in primary care. This missed opportunity, in part, reflects minimal oral health content and insufficient emphasis on mouth-body connection in the non-dental health profession curricula. And this gap is even more relevant for patients burdened with oral disease who don’t have dental insurance.”

She rolled up her sleeves to bridge this knowledge gap and contribute to oral health equity. Her mentor and former faculty member Arnie Rosenheck, who was an avid proponent of oral cancer screening, encouraged her to participate in this endeavor. Fatahzadeh developed oral

health modules tailored to the needs of various health profession programs within Rutgers. She aimed to provide future healthcare providers with foundational knowledge about oral health and disease. Rutgers’ Physician Assistant Program was the first place Fatahzadeh approached to offer her oral health module back in 2004. From there on, other schools came on board to have Fatahzadeh offer her modules to their students, including Rutgers’ medical and nursing schools. Her efforts over the past two decades have not gone unnoticed, and she received the 2025 Rutgers Health Distinguished Interprofessional Clinical Educator Award, nominated by colleagues from multiple health professions schools.

“It is through collaboration that the best healthcare can be provided to our patients,” said Claire O’Connell, associate professor and director of didactic education at Rutgers School of Health Professions’ Physician Assistant Program. “Oral care is vital to overall health. The Physician Assistant Program embraces a humanistic, patient-centered model of care. Dr. Fatahzadeh exemplifies this in her teaching and practice. She is an excellent clinician and an exceptional role model.”

## Dean Feldman Recognized for Her Visionary Leadership

Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) Dean Cecile A. Feldman has been honored with the Gies Award for Eminence in Vision and Leadership by the American Dental Education Association’s (ADEA) Gies Foundation.

“Dr. Feldman’s work has been transformative for dental education,” said President of ADEA Gies Foundation Marsha Pyle. “She has the ability to focus comments and action for some of the most critical challenges facing our profession. Because of her work, we have seen progress on these challenges.”



Watch Feldman’s awardee video





craft

# A Day to Celebrate Research

Each year, Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) holds Dr. Michael P. Balbo Research Day to celebrate research by pre- and post-doctoral candidates. This year, 26 poster presentations covered topics from oral hygiene to oral cancer to radiology.



KAREN EREN

Clinical Research  
1st Place

Poster title: *Assessing Antibiotic Prescribing Post-Implant Placement Surgery*

Faculty mentors: Janine Fredericks-Younger and Cecile A. Feldman

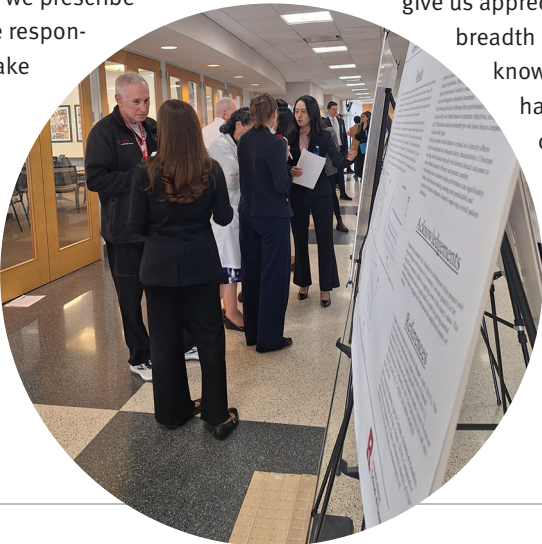


What was your research about?

A lot of dentists prescribe antibiotics routinely, but research suggests that these may not actually be necessary—especially for healthy patients. Overusing antibiotics can lead to bigger public health problems like antibiotic resistance. We reviewed patient records from RSDM’s post-graduate clinics to see how often antibiotics were being prescribed after implant placement, whether they made a difference in preventing infection, and if they impacted the long-term success of the implants.

How did this research experience contribute to your studies and growth as a dentist in training?

This experience really helped me connect what we learn in lectures to what actually happens in patient care. It pushed me to think more critically and reminded me how important it is to base our decisions on solid evidence. I also started to see just how powerful data can be; looking at real patient outcomes helped me understand how research can directly shape better clinical practices. More than anything, it made me more thoughtful about how and when we prescribe medications, and the responsibility we have to make choices that are not only good for the individual patient, but also mindful of the bigger picture, like antibiotic resistance.



JANZEL GARZON

Post-graduate 1st Place

Poster title: *Correlating Occlusion with TMJ Condylar Head Position and Posture in Patients Using CBCT*

Faculty mentor: Maxine Strickland



What was your research about?

My research examined the correlation between posture, dental occlusion, and temporomandibular joint (TMJ) symptoms. In other words, how we look when we stand up, how our teeth come together, and if there is any pain/discomfort in our ears and jaw as a result. There are a lot of factors that can cause TMJ symptoms and pain, but we wanted to see if posture can affect this. This research is especially important in the digital age, where people are more likely to use smartphones and tablets that can all affect our posture. Specifically, in my generation, Gen-Z, this can be an area of research in the future that can be crucial to understand to attempt to intervene with TMJ pain.

How did this research experience contribute to your studies and growth as a dentist?

These sorts of research experiences contribute tremendously to one’s critical thinking skills, collaborative work ethic, and overall knowledge. It also should be used as a humbling experience to show us, as clinicians and scientists, that there is always so much more to learn and give us appreciation for the breadth of topics and knowledge that has yet to be discovered.

KATHRYN ROEDER

Basic Research 1st Place

Poster title: *The Impact of Bdellovibrio Bacteriovorus on Immune Response Using a Pulpitis Rodent Model*  
Faculty mentors: Emi Shimizu and Daniel Kadouri



What was your research about?

My research explored the potential of using predatory bacteria to prevent pulp infections and promote the healing of dental pulp. We investigated *Bdellovibrio bacteriovorus*, a predatory bacterium, by introducing it into a dental pulp exposed to harmful bacteria known to cause necrosis. Our findings demonstrated that *B. bacteriovorus* effectively targeted and destroyed the harmful bacteria, prevented pulp necrosis, and stimulated a beneficial immune response. Furthermore, the bacteria contributed to the healing and regeneration of the dental pulp. The goal is to develop a therapeutic approach using this bacterium to prevent pulp infections and root canal treatments.

How did this research experience contribute to your studies and growth as a dentist in training?

This experience has enhanced my appreciation for the complexities of dental pulp infections and how innovative approaches, like using predatory bacteria, could revolutionize how we treat conditions that traditionally require root canals. It also strengthened my problem-solving and research skills, as I had to think critically about how to design and implement experiments, analyze results, and consider potential clinical applications. Overall, this research has expanded my perspective on dentistry, motivating me to explore emerging fields in oral health that could lead to more sustainable, less invasive treatment options for patients.

KRISHNA PRAKASH

Post-graduate 1st Place

Poster title: *Unlocking Patterns in Prosthodontics: An NLP-Driven Analysis of ACP National Resident Exam Trends to Enhance Study Strategies*  
Faculty mentors: Chao-Ho Chien and Mohammad Ali Saghiri



What was your research about?

Prosthodontics is a broad field with different niches within it. Simply by virtue of its scope, the field presents a challenge of being able to keep up with the amount of research papers, clinical findings and evolving techniques. This is where our research came in. We used Natural Language Processing, or NLP, to organize 10 years’ worth of published National Prosthodontics Resident Examination data, drawing patterns from it. The real point of the research was to show how NLP can be a powerful tool in dentistry. By helping us organize and understand vast amounts of clinical data, there’s immense potential in finding better treatment strategies or identifying emerging trends in research.

How did this research experience contribute to your studies and growth as a dentist?

This research experience has truly reshaped how I approach information within dentistry. It unlocked for me a crucial perspective: the power of organized data. As a dentist in training, I’m constantly bombarded with new studies, techniques, and clinical guidelines. This project illuminated the fundamental importance of being able to structure and analyze this vast sea of information. It’s not just about memorizing facts, but about building a framework to understand the evidence that underpins our practice.

## Top Scholarship

Assistant Dean for Campus Life Herminio Perez and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Emily Sabato’s “Student support services: Perceptions and recommendations for the next generation” article became the top viewed article in *Journal of Dental Education*.

Additionally, Associate Professor of Restorative Dentistry Heba Elkassaby’s article, “A survey on utilization and barriers of digital removable prostheses in the US dental education,” published in the *Journal of Dental Education* also became a top viewed paper.





# From Cavities to Sleep Apnea: Dentists Can Assume New Role in Saving Lives

A patient dozes off in a dental chair despite the anxiety of an impending procedure. A seemingly unremarkable act, but—for dentists versed in the latest sleep research—this red flag hints at a life-threatening condition.

In a research review published in the *Journal of the American Dental Association*, Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) researchers identified dentists as an unexpected player in the battle against life-threatening sleep disorders.

The review suggests dental professionals have unique opportunities to screen

“Dentists can be the first line of defense in identifying sleep disorders. They often see symptoms long before physicians. Indicators like tooth grinding, tongue scalloping or even a patient dozing off in the chair can be early signs that something more is going on.”

DAVIS THOMAS

“We have a great opportunity to change lives for the better,” said Davis Thomas, clinical associate professor and senior author of the review. “Dentists can be the first line of defense in identifying sleep disorders. They often see symptoms long before physicians. Indicators like tooth grinding, tongue scalloping or even a patient dozing off in the chair can be early signs that something more is going on.”

for conditions such as obstructive sleep apnea, a disorder that affects millions of Americans and is linked to serious health risks, including cardiovascular disease and neurodegeneration.

It also challenges dentists to look beyond teeth and gums to the broader landscape of patient health.

Sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea affect more than half of Americans at some point in their lives. Many cases go undiagnosed, but dentists can play an important role in reducing those numbers.

The review outlines several key indicators that dental clinicians should look for during examinations, including enlarged jaw muscles, scalloped tongue edges, white lines on the cheeks, restricted visibility of the throat, dental wear patterns, and tiny cracks on teeth.

These physical signs, combined with patient history and simple screening tools, can help dentists identify at-risk patients with up to 80 percent accuracy.

“It’s not just about looking at teeth anymore,” Thomas said. “We need to observe the whole patient, from their behavior in

the waiting room to the subtle signs in their oral cavity.”

Another sign of concern, according to the review authors, is bruxism, commonly known as teeth grinding. Contrary to long-held beliefs, the studies suggest teeth grinding is often a symptom of underlying sleep issues rather than a standalone problem caused by dental misalignment.

“We’ve been treating the symptoms without addressing the root cause for far too long,” Thomas said. “By understanding the neuroscience behind sleep disorders, we can provide more comprehensive care and potentially prevent serious health complications.”

This shift in perspective could have far-reaching implications. By identifying patients at risk for sleep disorders, dentists can facilitate early intervention, potentially preventing complications such as hypertension, heart disease, and stroke.

To implement these findings, Thomas and his team propose a simple protocol for dental practices: incorporate sleep-related questions into patient history forms. Other recommendations include training dental staff to recognize physical signs of sleep disorders and using validated screening tools like the STOP-BANG (snoring, tiredness, observed apnea, blood pressure, body mass index, age, neck size, gender) questionnaire, which screens for obstructive sleep apnea and establish referral networks with sleep medicine specialists.

“We’re not asking dentists to diagnose sleep disorders,” Thomas said. “We’re asking them to recognize the signs and make appropriate referrals. This simple act can be lifesaving.”

Thomas recommends that dentists looking to incorporate sleep screening into their practices start with education. “Attend sleep medicine conferences, take continuing education courses, and stay up-to-date with the latest research,” he said. “The more we learn, the more we realize how much we don’t know—and how much we can do to help our patients.” —Andrew Smith



## Barcelona to New Jersey

Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) has externship programs with universities worldwide, including Albania, Spain, Ireland, Chile, and India. Fourth-year dental student Paula Bota Carbonell came to RSDM from the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC) in Barcelona, Spain, for two weeks to get a glimpse of American dental education. She answered our questions, reflecting on her time.

**Why were you interested in doing this externship program at RSDM?**

I wanted to participate in the didactic and clinical externship program at RSDM to experience different dental methodologies and practices in another country. I was also particularly interested in learning more about the international program that allows foreign-trained dentists to receive their degrees in the US. When we arrived, we were introduced to this program in more detail, and it really caught my attention. I returned home even more motivated to finish my last year and a half of dental school so that I could later pursue that opportunity.

**How was your time at RSDM?**

At RSDM, we had the chance to observe dental students in the clinic performing treatments such as fillings, prosthodontics, and more. We also took the opportunity to join orthodontic residents, as I am particularly passionate about orthodontics. Additionally, my colleague Laura [from Barcelona] and I, who both love surgical procedures, observed periodontal surgeries, including implant placements, which was an incredible learning experience. I would just add how welcoming and supportive everyone at RSDM was. The faculty and students were always open to sharing their knowledge, making this experience even more valuable. It was truly inspiring, and I’m very grateful for the opportunity.







## Experiences with Imprint

**S**eventy-eight years ago, Gertrude Gompers, along with her two brothers and parents, sailed to a new life. The family left the UK, where they found temporary shelter from Hitler's reach, for a permanent home in the US.

"Experiences like that leave their imprint," said Gompers, who, at the time, was nine years old.

Now, at 87, one of the most grueling times of her life has led her to a dental care experience with a positive mark. Gompers is a patient at Rutgers School of Dental Medicine's (RSDM) Holocaust Survivors Program, started with the generosity of Howard Drew, an RSDM faculty born to two survivors.

"I can't tell you how incredibly lucky I feel to have been connected to Rutgers School of Dental Medicine," said Gompers. "I'm touched by the recognition of that time. ... [The Holocaust Survivors Program is] making a statement against hatred, racism, and evil by showing kindness and respect."



Through the program, Gompers had several procedures, including oral surgery, crowns, and a root canal treatment. Her student doctor was Igor Tomin, under the supervision of Assistant Professor of Clinical Affairs John Moran. Said Gompers: "[Igor] has treated me with the utmost respect. He has made me feel so important, as if I were very special."

Gompers was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1937, shortly before Hitler annexed the country. First, both of her parents lost their jobs in the fashion industry. Then,

they faced increasing pressure to leave the country. But they stayed. Gompers' mother had to scrub the streets while her father couldn't find any employment. In this difficult time, Gompers' grandmother took them under her wings and gave them all her money to escape to the UK when things got even tougher. Gompers' aunt and her English husband forged bank books to show they could afford to support their relatives. "We left on November 6th, 1938," she said. She never heard from her grandparents again. In the UK,

[The Holocaust Survivors Program is] making a statement against hatred, racism, and evil by showing kindness and respect.

GERTRUDE GOMPERS

their first stop was London. From there, they were sent to an internment camp on the Isle of Man. Following this, the family left for America as their final destination.

"We had to start all over again," she said, in a one-bedroom apartment in New York. "We ate a lot of potatoes but were happy." Despite being a bright student, Gompers had to join the workforce after high school and could never attend college. She first worked at a large advertising company and later got involved in politics and worked for a congressman.

Life went on looking ahead to the future until Gompers' mother and she spoke about her grandparents—a subject that was too painful. Those conversations led Gompers to start looking back and diving into the past to write a biography. "I realized my grandparents had actually sacrificed their lives for us," she said. Gompers discovered that both were murdered in concentration camps. These learnings pushed her to seek ways to change people's perceptions of one another, especially of children. Her first "gig," she said, was arranged by the Holocaust Museum of Philadelphia in the aftermath of the city's 1985 bombing. She spoke at a neighborhood school. "I started telling them about my experiences, and they were crying," she recounted. "They hugged and kissed me, not because they loved me, but because we felt their pain."

She continues this mission of talking about unity. "Because, like the students I speak to...that bridges many gaps."





# Not a Day, but a Season of Smiles

**R**utgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) held its annual Give Kids a Smile Day on February 7 to provide complimentary oral healthcare to Newark children. But this year’s efforts had a wider reach.

The RSDM Pediatric Dentistry and Community Health Department turned this one-day event into a series to care for more children in the community throughout February—the National Children’s Dental Health Month—and beyond. In February alone, RSDM provided care to nearly 200 students from Sarah Ward Nursery, Augusta Preschool Academy, Grove Street Elementary School, Newark

Educators Community Charter School, and Sandy Lane Nursery School. More children from other local schools visited RSDM in March and April.

“We were able to accommodate more schools throughout the month by providing more dates and extending the events,” said Maria LaBoy, clinical services supervisor in the Pediatric Dentistry Department, who led the organization of these events. LaBoy received support from the Horizon Foundation for New Jersey and RSDM volunteers as well as the RSDM Student Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. “It was a pleasure seeing the children and giving



them a friendly trip to the dentist,” said LaBoy. “They learned how to care for their teeth in a fun-filled setting.”

One of the student organizers Nicole Tobia of the Class of 2026 said: “Give Kids a Smile has been a meaningful part of my dental school journey, and having the chance to help plan it this year made it even more special. I loved creating a fun, positive experience for the kids, showing them that going to the dentist can be enjoyable. Seeing their excitement confirmed my passion for dentistry and the

impact we can have on shaping life-long oral health habits.”

RSDM has also been visiting local schools and health centers to deliver oral healthcare. For instance, Assistant Professor of Pediatric Dentistry Mary Beth Giacona, along with RSDM’s third-year DMD candidates and pediatric residents, teamed up with Mary Eliza Mahoney Health Center, run by RSDM alumna Baseemah Marshall, to kick off their inaugural Give Kids a Smile Day.



Assistant Professor of Pediatric Dentistry Mary Beth Giacona and five first- and second-year students went to Irwin Elementary School in East Brunswick to give oral health education and perspectives on careers in dentistry to over 300 students.



RSDM students and faculty went to Mary Eliza Mahoney Health Center’s inaugural Give Kids a Smile Day, run by dental director and RSDM alum Baseemah Marshall.



# From California to New Jersey for Diagnosis

**B**ecky Robbins began to experience twitching on the left side of her face in 2021. She first thought it was temporary, but it returned a few months later. And then again. And again.

“I just didn’t know what in the world was happening to me,” said Robbins, an artist, mentor, and a former nurse living in California.

She went to a neurosurgeon in San Diego. “He was not with me more than five minutes and told me I needed brain surgery,” she recounted. “I’m a pretty strong person, but I walked out, sat down on the bench outside, and just cried because it was so shocking that I needed brain surgery.” She then went to

a second doctor, who told her all the possible side effects of the surgery, “which made it sound so like you would only do this if this were an emergency.” Her symptoms continued to get worse; she continued to look around. “It was getting so bad that I couldn’t smile on my left side, and I looked like I had a stroke,” she said. “And the most amazing thing happened...I’ve happened to tune into a podcast [on Instagram], where Dr. [Gary] Heir was on.” Gary Heir is the Robert and Susan Carmel Chair in Algesiology and director of the Center for Temporomandibular Disorders and Orofacial Pain at Rutgers School of Dental Medicine—one of only 15 orofacial pain post-graduate programs nationwide. With in two days, she got an appointment with

I’ve never been seen by anyone who took so much time with me and was so kind and committed to finding a solution.

BECKY ROBBINS

Heir and flew out to New Jersey in March of 2024.

“I’ve never been seen by anyone who took so much time with me

and was so kind and committed to finding a solution,” she said of Heir, who asked “a million questions,” trying to piece together her case. “Imagine what that feels like to be so vulnerable flying to the other side of the country because that’s the only choice you feel like you have left, and then getting to see Dr. Heir, I mean, I could cry right now talking about it just because for him to be so compassionate; I was just a stranger.”

After assessing the situation, Heir suspected a vascular contact of the seventh cranial nerve and immediately reached out to his colleague Stephen Johnson, a neurosurgeon at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. “Frequently patients with complicated chronic orofacial pain and movement disorders such as Becky are often at a loss as to where to go for help,” said Heir and stressed the importance of the multidisciplinary approach used in her case and the ability to call on caring physicians such as Johnson.

With Johnson’s direction, they ordered an MRI. The next day, she met with Johnson. “I was fraught; I didn’t know what in the world was wrong with me and what was going to happen, and he showed me



what was going on.” Johnson confirmed the diagnosis suspected by Heir; Robbins had a vascular contact of a cranial nerve responsible for her facial muscles of expression “With every beat of my heart, the blood vessel was pushing on the nerve and damaging it,” she said. Johnson also recommended surgery as the only solution to permanently fix the issue. The surgery was risky, he explained, but said he would do his very best and gave her his cell phone number for her to think over.

“When you’re facing brain surgery, it’s not a light decision to make,” she said. “I could text him day and night, ask him any questions, and he would get right back to me. He’s just amazing.”

In the meantime, she tried Botox injections that initially helped but stopped working soon after. She was amid creating a television show, and her twitching would become so bad that she would need to stop the roll, wait it out, and restart it. In October 2024, “I finally texted him and said ‘I need to talk to you. It’s time.’” They created a timeline for Robbins’ surgery while she got her affairs in order. Then, she went back to New Jersey. Johnson performed a vascular decompression of the nerve. “I’m so glad I’m on the other side of it,” she said with gratitude.

Heir added, “Her symptoms resolved rapidly, and she remains symptom-free for one year.”

## Branching out with Skills

**I**n the chair, endodontics resident Olivia Isshak ’21 had a 12-year-old patient. He was suffering from inflamed nerves and needed three root canals on his front teeth. He was in so much pain that even Isshak could sense it. The moment she got the nerves out of his teeth, both felt an instant relief. So did his mother, who came back the next day just to tell Isshak how much of a difference she made in her son’s life and how he began eating, smiling, and dancing again.

“It’s so difficult for these patients to come to the clinic, yet she came back just to tell that,” Isshak said. “It made me tear up, and the mother said, ‘Don’t ever stop what you do because this is all we have.’”

Isshak, a second-year resident at Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM), went to Jamaica on a mission trip supported by the AAE Foundation for Endodontics. She is a member of its Resident Expert Advisory Council (REACH) Committee, which helps the organization to connect with the next generation of endodontists. When the opportunity came up, she was in.

“My family is from Syria, so I’m a product of an immigrant family and understand access to care can be very difficult and, especially, to specialty care,” she said. “I feel like I’m finally at the point in my life where I can apply my skills to provide a service to help people, and I wanted to take advantage of that.”

Isshak grew up in New Jersey. She went to Rutgers for her undergraduate degree and then enrolled in RSDM. Following dental school, she completed a general practice residency at Hackensack University Medical Center, where she discovered her interest in endodontics during rotations. She later shadowed an endodontist—an experience that affirmed her decision to return to her alma mater for her endodontics residency.

“Rutgers prepares you clinically so much more than you can ever imagine,”

she said. “I’m grateful to have gone to this dental school because we’ve always had a great patient population, and professors are more than willing to help us excel in dentistry and constantly challenge us.”

These clinical skills came in handy on the one-week Jamaica trip. She saved many teeth that would have gotten extracted, especially the front teeth. “I didn’t know this before, but a lot of the people in Jamaica end up getting service jobs that require front teeth, so these meant everything to them because missing your front tooth means you may not have a job.” She also practiced thinking on her feet. “Sometimes the radiographs

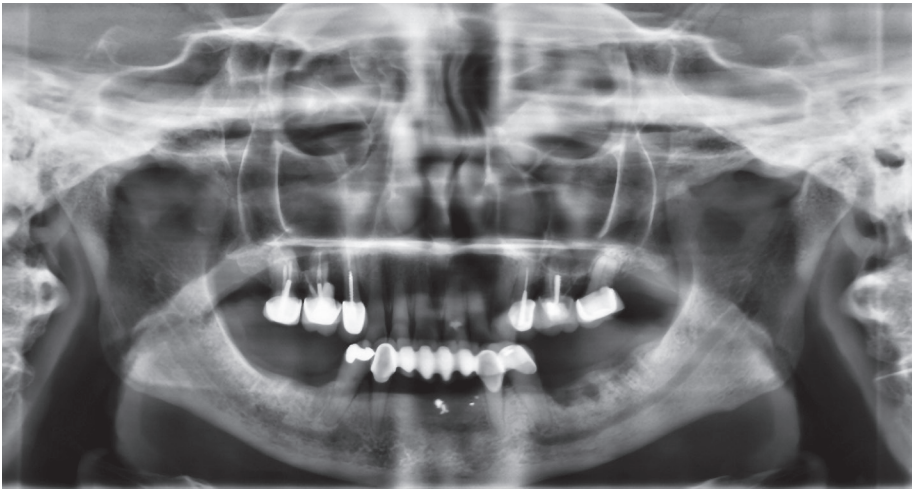


would stop working, sometimes my suction would go out, and I’d have to figure out how to adjust. There was a lot of problem-solving.”

This trip was her first, but she hopes it will not be the last.

“I just want to get a little bit more experience under my belt [with these volunteer trips],” she said, “and eventually, I can see myself mentoring one.” Maybe, she said, it could be to help Syrian refugees. “I want to give back to where I came from.”





# Osteonecrosis Patient Finds Relief at RSDM

While undergoing treatment for osteoporosis—a condition that weakens bones and makes them prone to fractures—Sally Wolberg had a tooth extraction that led to the onset of constant pain. For three long years, she sought relief from numerous dentists, visited eight oral and maxillofacial surgeons, and even ended up in the emergency room a couple of times. Her hope began to dwindle.

“Nobody would help me,” said Wolberg. “I was dismissed for exaggerating. I felt horrible that nobody would hear me.” On the verge of losing hope, Wolberg heard about Rutgers School of Dental Medicine and wanted to give it a try. She went to the school’s New Brunswick faculty practice and became a patient of Associate Professor of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, and Director of the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Residency Training Program Rabie Shanti.

“Certain medications used in the treatment of osteoporosis place patients at risk for the development of osteonecrosis, which is osteo (bone) and necrosis (death

of cells),” explained Shanti. This condition, referred to as medication related osteonecrosis of the jaw, can sometimes require surgery and the operation is highly effective in alleviating symptoms and improving quality of life. That was the case for Wolberg.

“I finally got out of pain,” said Wolberg. Recently, she underwent another extraction, and thanks to Shanti’s treatment, she experienced no issues this time. “Dr. Shanti is phenomenal. He just really went to bat for me.”

Wolberg continues her treatment with Assistant Professor of Restorative Dentistry Uchenna Akosa, who leads the New Brunswick Practice and has been providing routine care, including root canal treatment to alleviate pain and preserve her teeth.

“Patients with osteoporosis and who are taking medications for it need special treatment plans geared towards avoiding any invasive procedures that can cause osteonecrosis,” Akosa explained. They also need more frequent follow-ups. Akosa has been keeping a close eye on Wolberg’s treatment.

“It wasn’t until I went to Rutgers Dental,” Wolberg said, “that I got the help I needed.”

## Mission of Care

Assistant Dean for Campus Life Herminio Perez took RSDM students on a mission trip to La Romana, Dominican Republic.



# Technology Meets Dentures

Getting dentures normally takes around five dentist visits. But Clinical Assistant Professor of Restorative Dentistry Hua Zhu can deliver them in only two appointments. And she can do them from anywhere, including from a kitchen table in her home country, China, where she made dentures for her aunt.

Zhu’s secret? A specially designed impression tray plus digital dentistry.

Her innovative approach grew out of her experiences with an 84-year-old patient who suffered a stroke and began grinding his teeth. “He ground so much so that he would need new dentures in a year and a half,” she said and wondered, “What can I do to replicate them again?” She

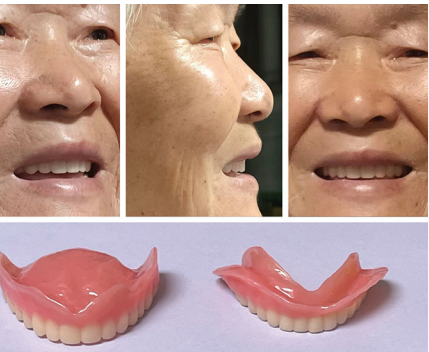
began experimenting. She developed a 3D-printed thermoplastic resin tray with standardized tooth positions. When used with moldable material, the tray can capture tooth positions, bite relationships, and definitive impressions in a single visit. Then, she scans the impressions for the laboratory to make the dentures. One more visit and the patient gets their 3D-milled dentures, which offer a better fit than the traditional dentures.

“It saves a lot of time,” she said, “and works very well.”

Zhu has a knack and a passion for research. After medical school in China, she came to Rutgers for her PhD in molecular biology. While doing cancer research, she realized she wanted to help people more directly. She recalled her dentistry class in medical school when her instructor made her dental composites, which changed

her life. “I lived in an area in China with water that caused enamel damage,” she said. “In wintertime, I couldn’t talk to people because of sensitivity.” Consequently, she often found herself hiding her smile. But after composites, that changed. “I could smile and talk,” she said. This was a life-changing event that piqued her interest in dentistry. However, it could not become a career-changing experience as veering to dentistry from medicine was tough in China, she explained. During her PhD at Rutgers, she revisited the idea and saw that it was a possibility. “I just felt that from my experience, I could be a really good dentist.” She attended Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM). She finished her program in 2004 and began teaching part-time immediately after.

Twenty years later, she aims to position RSDM as a leader in advancing digital dentistry through the school’s state-of-the-art Georges E. Sara Digital Dentistry Center. She is also developing educational videos and step-by-step protocols to be widely used at the school. “My goal is to put this in all schools,” she said. She also wants to improve the technology she uses to get a full-face scan for labs to produce even better dentures.



“People who need dentures are often underserved,” she said. “Many are older people needing dentures and counting on their caregivers to bring them in. With this, dentists can go to the elderly. So, this has a big public health aspect.”



## Grateful Dental Patient Fashions a Sculpture of Gratitude

George Cooke kept a small piece of translucent white alabaster for years, waiting for the right moment to carve it into something meaningful.

He recently transformed it into a molar tooth sculpture and gifted it to his dentist, Raphael Figueroa—a present from hands that create to hands that heal.

“It’s a beautiful gift, and nobody will do it just because,” said Figueroa, a clinical associate professor of diagnostic sciences at Rutgers who donated the sculpture to the School of Dental Medicine. “I believe more people should enjoy it. This gift is a blessing, and we have to pass it on.”

Cooke began woodcarving on his own about 30 years ago as a hobby while

working in IT data security and disaster recovery. He later took classes at the American Wood Carving School in Wayne, NJ, where he eventually taught courses. He expanded into stone carving after discovering a class in New York more than a decade ago and attended for five years.

His work has been featured in galleries and shows in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Moreover, he was commissioned to carve a large, 3,000-pound limestone sculpture for McGowan Park Community Park at his town, Ridgefield Park, NJ.

The idea for the gift came about when Cooke’s wife, Linda, visited Figueroa. The two happen to start talking about Cooke’s work. “She came home and told me about it, and she said, ‘You ought to carve him a tooth,’” Cooke said.

He searched online for molar images.

“We all know basically what a tooth looks like, but when you’re trying to actually carve it, you need a model,” he said.

Using the alabaster that was three and a half inches in diameter and three inches high, he first carved it, then wet-sanded it in a tub of water with varying grits of

sandpaper until it was smooth, then carved the root from wood.

“I looked it up and learned not all teeth have four roots,” Cooke said. “In fact, that’s fairly rare. But to make it symmetrical and stand, I did the four.”

After about 15 hours of work, the sculpture was complete.

“You carved it with precise anatomy,” Figueroa said as Cooke described his process.

This wasn’t the first artwork Cooke created for Figueroa. Based on a drawing by Figueroa’s former student, Irene Kontogiannis, Cooke spent around three weeks and carved a wooden portrait of the professor’s daughter, Elizabeth Gabriella Figueroa. Cooke completed it at a carving school in Austria, where he sought help with the face – his less familiar specialty – though he had previously carved the faces of his father and three granddaughters.

“When I saw the wood, we loved it,” said Figueroa. “It has a special place in my heart.”

The sculpture is now displayed at the school’s Oral Health Pavilion for the community to enjoy.

Cooke was pleasantly surprised upon learning Figueroa was donating the sculpture to the school.

“I’m so excited about it,” said Cooke, a proud Rutgers parent. (His younger daughter graduated from the School of Engineering and his oldest granddaughter earned a political science degree from the School of Arts and Sciences. His other granddaughter is still pursuing her undergraduate studies.)

“I had no idea that he even taught there, much less that they had a place to display things like this,” Cooke said of Figueroa. “I was flattered that he would consider this good enough to be on display at the dental school. I had no idea what effect this gift would have.”

## Providing Care for Veterans

Glenn Ford came to Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) after losing between 14 to 16 teeth. With the help of his student doctor, Brett Chappell of the Class of 2025, Ford became a patient at the school’s Vet Smiles Program. Started with donations from The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, New Jersey Health Foundation, and Delta Dental of New Jersey, the program has been providing dental care to 175 veterans.

“Student doctor Brett put the cape on and came back. He said, ‘Hey man, come on down, you all lined up,’” recounted Ford with a smile.

From regular cleanings to fillings, crowns, and dentures, these veterans are treated at the school’s dental clinics in Newark. Depending on the complexity of their case, they are seen either by pre-doctoral or resident student doctors under the close supervision of RSDM faculty, who are licensed dentists. Through Vet Smiles, eligible Essex County veterans can receive free care for all treatments except for implants while other New Jersey veterans can receive dentures only. There is currently a waiting list for the program.



“These veterans have been through so much, and I think we need to appreciate our veterans just by being here in the United States,” said Assistant Professor of Clinical Affairs John Moran. “It’s such an important part of who we are.”

Chappell feels the same way. “This university has given me the opportunity to

grow and learn as a skilled dental professional, and it’s even more special when I get to pay back to someone who served our country,” he said. Chappell joined the US Army Dental Corps to serve as a dental officer following graduation.

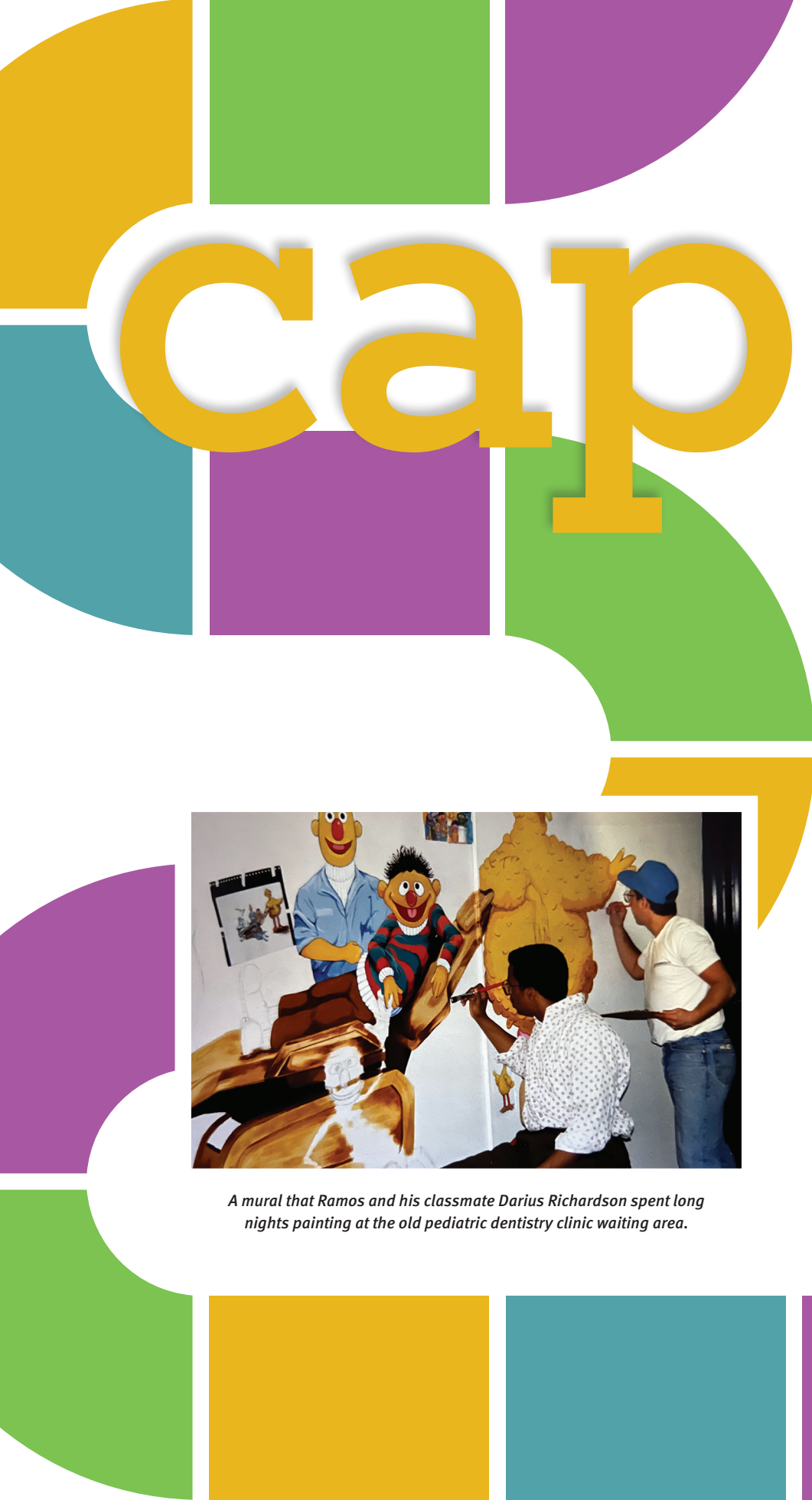


## Students and Faculty Recognized

We, together with the Jewish Federation for Greater MetroWest New Jersey, celebrated our student doctors and faculty in the school’s Holocaust Survivors Program.

*The sculpture on display at RSDM.*





# Try It Out Because You Never Know

**A**s a child, Mario Ramos’ grandmother would say, “You should be a dentist.” To this day, he doesn’t fully know what she saw in him. Maybe it had something to do with him taking apart her vacuum cleaner. But in any case, she was right.

Ramos has been a pediatric dentist for over 30 years, running a successful private practice that serves children and patients with special needs. He’s also the president of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) Foundation, which has helped 830,000 children access dental care since 2010.

“I consider myself very lucky that I was able to find a career in a profession that works for me,” said Ramos of the Class of 1992.

Finding this career was a result of listening to those around him. While pursuing his undergraduate degree, he met a Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM), then the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, representative. With his grandmother’s words in his ear, he got advice on how to enter dental school and later sought a dental internship.

“Back in those days, we found jobs with a newspaper,” he said. After many no responses, one said yes. Starting with sterilization, he moved up to dental assistant, then head dental assistant. While working

full-time, he completed dental school prerequisites and headed to Fairleigh Dickinson University’s dentistry program, which closed a year into his first year. He was among the three transfer students that RSDM accepted.

Ramos eyed becoming an oral surgeon and did internships, research, and clinical practice to pursue that goal. However, he discovered a natural talent for working with kids during his pediatric dentistry

rotation. That didn’t go unnoticed by the faculty, who recommended he consider pediatric dentistry while applying for residency programs.

“I wanted to work with surgically complicated, medically compromised patients. I wanted something challenging,” said Ramos. He then learned this was still an option for pediatric dentists. “I would have never known had faculty not told

me,” he said. “That’s my advice to students—try things out because you never know.” He did just that and applied to multiple programs, including Harvard University’s program with Boston Children’s Hospital and fell in love with it. “That was the best professional decision I ever made,” he said.

During his residency at Harvard, he noticed the advantage of his Rutgers training.

“I was probably ahead of most of the residents in terms of my clinical skills that I learned at Rutgers,” he said. Upon graduation, he rejoined the practice that gave him his start—now

as a dentist. He also began teaching pediatric dentistry at Rutgers. Because

he observed that dentists doing multiple things were happier with their profession, he tried to do the same. Shortly after, he started his practice with classmate Carmine Russo. But teaching remained a passion.

“What better gift to give someone than your knowledge?” he asked. “Teaching gives back just as much as I gave, if not more.”

After a decade of teaching, he turned to organized dentistry, joining the AAPD board. “As practitioners, we can only help a certain number of patients in our offices,” he said, “but organized dentistry allows us to touch many more patients.” He served on several committees and transitioned to the AAPD Foundation, which he leads now.

He still mentors students—many of whom became pediatric dentists. “This year is my 30th year, and I still love it,” he said. “I love seeing a two-year-old smile. It’s very rewarding.”

What better gift  
to give someone  
than your knowledge?  
Teaching gives back  
just as much as I gave,  
if not more.

MARIO RAMOS



*A mural that Ramos and his classmate Darius Richardson spent long nights painting at the old pediatric dentistry clinic waiting area.*





# Meet Zain Ahmed

## Class of 2025

Zain Ahmed '25, a dual-degree student, pursued both a doctor of dental medicine and a master of public health. He fielded our questions about his time at Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM).

**Why did you decide to come to RSDM?**

Because of its strong clinical training, diverse patient population, and hands-on learning opportunities. I wanted a school that would challenge me to become a well-rounded clinician by exposing me to a wide range of cases and patient needs. The opportunity to work in various clinical settings, including hospital-based and community clinics, was also a major factor in my decision, as it provides invaluable real-world experience in treating complex cases. Another important reason was its proximity to home and family. Additionally, Rutgers as a university has always felt like home to me. Having completed my undergraduate studies here, I knew first-hand the strength of Rutgers community and the wealth of opportunities available to students.

**What was one of your favorite memories from dental school?**

One of my favorite memories from dental school was the opportunity to represent Rutgers alongside Daniel Brigham '26 at the American Institute of Dental Public Health's Federal Service Immersion. We visited various federal agencies in Washington, DC, where we engaged with leaders in dental public health and health policy. It was an incredible opportunity to gain first-hand insight into how different federal agencies operate and contribute to oral health initiatives on a national level.

**What shaped your interest in public health?**

Growing up, I was encouraged to find ways to make a meaningful impact, and my

older sister first introduced me to the concept of public health when she pursued it as a major before attending medical school. Our conversations, combined with my upbringing, sparked my initial interest in the field. As I explored public health further in college, I had the opportunity to shadow at the Veterans Hospital in East Orange, where I witnessed the gaps in dental care.... My experiences shadowing in other dental settings exposed me to broader disparities in oral health education and access to care.... Whether it's improving access to care, shaping policy, or addressing disparities in oral health literacy, I see public health as an essential component of dentistry that extends beyond the operatory to create lasting change on a broader scale.

**Do you have plans for after graduation?**

I'll be doing a general practice residency at JFK Medical Center in Edison....The program knows how passionate I am about public health and is giving me the chance to work on initiatives that align with my interests, which I really appreciate. After my GPR, I plan to pursue a residency in dental public health. I am also looking forward to serving as one of the initial board members of the New Jersey Dental Foundation, helping shape its mission and work toward increasing access to oral healthcare in New Jersey for years to come.

**What are you going to miss most about RSDM?**

The people—the faculty, staff, and students who have made this journey so meaningful. The supportive environment



Above: Ahmed at the US Senate.

Below: Ahmed with Daniel Brigham (right) in Washington, DC.

has played a huge role in my growth, both professionally and personally. There are too many faculty members to name individually, but so many have had a lasting impact on me....The staff has also been an integral part of my experience at RSDM. I'll especially miss our "Pre-clinic Moms," Loida and Audi, who were there from day one....Most of all, I'll miss my classmates and the friendships we've built over the years. From late nights studying to celebrating our achievements together, the sense of camaraderie has made the challenges of dental school much more manageable. —Fiona Blake '26

# Class of 2025

## Begins Their Alumni Chapter

On May 19, 2025, 128 Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) students received their DMD degrees, and 27 received advanced dental degrees in dental specialties at the Convocation held in New Jersey Performing Arts Center. The event marked a momentous milestone in their professional journeys.

Hannah Ciullo received the Stanley S. Bergen Jr., MD, Medal of Excellence, presented by Rutgers Health Vice Chancellor for Interprofessional Programs Denise Rodgers. This prestigious award is given to a graduating student from each Rutgers Health school who exemplifies outstanding academic accomplishments.

Additionally, 10 students, namely Marissa Danielle Bocchiaro, Brett John Chappell, Hannah Ciullo, Kinga Bernadetta Dabek, Ashley Rose Hay, Samara Jill Kaplan, Georgina Stampelos, Elias Burnett Travis, Rebekah Lynn Webster, and Zee-shan Zahid, were inducted into Omicron Kappa Upsilon (OKU) National Dental Honor Society, which recognizes the highest standards of scholarship, professionalism, and ethics in the dentistry.



# Student to Faculty

Assistant Professor of Restorative Dentistry Rami Muadab has been teaching at Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) since 2017. Read about his journey extending from Libya to Massachusetts to New Jersey.

**What was your path like coming to RSDM?**

In 2004, I attended dental school in Benghazi, Libya. Following my graduation, I spent five years in private practice in the same city. Subsequently, I returned to the academic setting and taught for one year. During this time, I was fortunate to secure a scholarship that enabled me to further my post-graduate education. I embarked on a two-year fellowship at Tufts University, where I also pursued my master's degree. In 2014, after successfully completing my fellowship, I commenced my prosthodontics residency at RSDM. Three years later, in 2017, I proudly concluded my prosthodontics residency. In 2020, I earned my DMD from RSDM's internationally trained faculty program and started practicing in the faculty practice shortly after. I initiated my journey as an educator here at RSDM. Since then, I have remained dedicated to my teaching role, and I continue to be an integral part of the RSDM community!

I teach in prosthodontics across both pre-doctoral and post-graduate clinics. Additionally, I'm the course director for the Dental Anatomy and Occlusion, guiding first-year dental students. Furthermore, I serve as the course director for the Restorative Lab Procedures, catering to internationally educated dentists.

**How long have you been here, and why did you decide to come to RSDM?**

I have been part of the RSDM community for nearly nine years, encompassing my prosthodontics residency. My decision to join RSDM was motivated by its rigorous and challenging program.

**What do you like the most about RSDM?**

What truly stands out to me is the remarkable diversity at this school. It offers an enriching experience, bringing together individuals from various cultures, making it incredibly fascinating and engaging. —Nansy Hanna '24





## Advocate of Dental Education

During dental school, George J. Schmidt of the Class of 1998 learned a lot from others. His mentors shared wisdom. His mother, a dental assistant, and stepfather, a dentist, guided his career.

“Many people inspired me, and that stuck with me all these years,” he said. “I said, if I had ever had the opportunity, I would certainly want to do that.”

And he did. He has become a source of inspiration to Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) alums and students and an advocate for dental education. He taught dentistry at every level, including pre- and post-doctoral students, as well as dentists pursuing continuing education. He was a clinical assistant professor at RSDM and later an adjunct clinical assistant professor at New York University College of Dentistry. He was a vice president of the RSDM Alumni Association, the past-president of the national dental honor society, Omicron Kappa Upsilon, and

held several roles in the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD). He has recently been named the vice president of AGD—a role through which he’ll further his and the organization’s commitment to education.

“Dentistry is a journey, and it’s really a life-long learning,” he said. “One of my main focuses is to continue ensuring that our dentists have the very best educational opportunities and that we provide the best advocacy for general dentists.”

Schmidt’s dental education journey began with his family’s encouragement but came to fruition with his recognition that dentistry blended many of his skills. He liked working, meeting, and helping people. He also felt he had a creative side and good manual dexterity.

He began his dental degree at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, now Rutgers. He tried taking in as much as possible from classes and the clinic. He also spoke to as many faculty as possible to learn from their experiences. “Oftentimes the students think the goal is to get out of school as soon as possible, but really the goal should be is to absorb as much as you can while you’re there,” he said and advised: “Make the most of

every opportunity and realize that it’s a big investment both in time and money.” Clinical Associate Professor of Restorative Dentistry Joseph Battaglia became one of his mentors at the school. “I really looked up to him during those years,” he said. “He remains a very close friend to this day, and we’ve kept that bond all along.”

In 2014, Schmidt became a faculty member at RSDM while working at his own practice. “Working with the younger dentists has appealed to me over the years,” he said. He mentored many students and tried to get them involved with the school and alumni association, and organized dentistry like Battaglia had encouraged him when he was a student. “Your education does not end when you graduate dental school, but rather it continues,” Schmidt said. “The foundation you build while you’re at the school, the more contacts you can have, the more experiences you can have, the better dentist you can become. If you collect enough of those experiences, you’ll filter it down and then create your own career.”

While teaching, Schmidt became more involved with the alumni body as well and held a few positions up to vice president in the RSDM Alumni Association. He helped create a mentorship program then called Care to Share, which has now evolved into a collaboration between RSDM and the New Jersey Dental Association. “It’s incumbent upon us as folks that have gone through everything and have had the benefit of a great career to give back to students and care to share knowledge, experience, funds, where the program was born,” he said. The program remains one of the most successful student-alumni events and happens every spring. He also helped establish several scholarships, such as the RSDM Class of 1998 Endowed Scholarship, the OKU Passion for Humanities Endowed Scholarship, and the New Jersey AGD Endowed Scholarship.

“It’s important for alumni and dentists to give back to the profession,” he said, “and we should always keep that in mind.”

## Small World

On a mid-June Saturday, eight Rutgers School of Dental Medicine (RSDM) alumni ran into each other at a community service event, Smiles for Our Heroes.

“It was so nice to see them,” said Kaitlyn Terry ’21, one of the attendees. “Even though we don’t know each other, I feel like we’re a family; there’s that connection.”

The one-day event was sponsored by Zufall Health and Delta Dental of New Jersey Foundation. From dentists to hygienists to students, 126 volunteers provided no-cost care to 71 veterans, including extractions, periodontal examinations, crowns, check-ups, x-rays, cleaning, and fillings.

“Veterans did and do so much for our country but it’s really difficult for them to get coverage, so, many of them are either uninsured or underinsured,” said Lisa Gallucci ’01, chair of Delta Dental of New Jersey Foundation. She noted that the eligibility criteria for dental care through Veterans Affairs is very limiting. “It was heartwarming to see all these volunteers come together, and it was nice to reconnect with [RSDM] alumni.”

Among the volunteers was RSDM Clinical Associate Professor of Periodontics Thomas Scorziello ’91. “I see different invitations for volunteer events through



dental organizations, and I always say, ‘Next year I’m going to do it,’ but this time I said, ‘I’m doing it.’” A reason was that Scorziello’s father and uncles were all in the military.

Community service runs deep in RSDM’s curriculum. The school has special patient programs, namely the Vet Smiles Program, the Ryan White Oral Health Services Program for people living with HIV/AIDS, and the Holocaust Survivors Program. Moreover, RSDM is an annual site for Give Kids a Smile Day. All the students are required to participate in various projects.

A recent graduate and now a general dentist at Zufall, Terry is a committed

volunteer. Every year, she goes on a Remote Area Medical mission to Pennsylvania to serve in their pop-up dental clinics that provide free dental services. “I love giving back to the community,” she said. “This is a great way to touch people emotionally and physically. I think God put me in this profession to really help people, and there are a lot of people in need.” She hopes other dentists consider volunteering too.

“It’s very rewarding for the patient but then also for us,” she said. “[It] brings you back to reality and focus as to why you’re really here on this earth and doing what you’re doing.”



## Alumni at Helm in ADEA

Associate Professor of Restorative Dentistry Eileen Hoskin (fifth from left) began her term as the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) Leadership Institute Alumni Association chair. She took the helm from the immediate past-chair and RSDM’s Assistant Dean for Campus Life Herminio Perez (second from right).



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## RSDM Timeline 2024

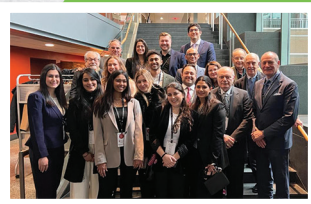
### January

From New Jersey to Georgia to Hawaii, the Class of 2024 was selected for post-graduate dental programs across the nation through the Post-doctoral Dental Matching Program. RSDM's match rate is significantly over the national rate of 66 percent.



### February

Oral and maxillofacial surgery resident Tyler Jacobs '26 and periodontics resident Ryan Levy '24 represented RSDM at the Northeast Implant Symposium, which took place at Harvard University. Jacobs received the "Best Clinical Presentation" award.



### March

Assistant Dean for Campus Life Herminio Perez received the 2024 Chair of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) Board of Directors Citation for his contributions as the chair of ADEA Annual Session Program Committee.



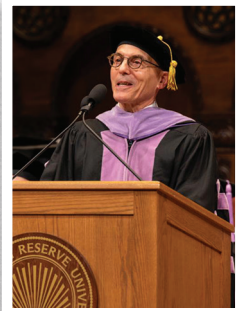
### April

Associate Professor of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Pamela Alberto received the 2024 Daniel M. Laskin Award for Outstanding Predoctoral Educator.



### May

Endodontics Department Chair and the Past-President of the American Association of Endodontists Craig Hirschberg delivered the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine's diploma ceremony address. The school's Dean, Kenneth Chance '82, is an RSDM alum and former faculty member.



### June

Alumna Elisa Velazquez '99 '01'02 became the 155th president of the New Jersey Dental Association.



### July

Our students in the RSDM Pediatrics Club put together over 50 backpacks with school and dental supplies to donate to a Newark school.



### August

RSDM, along with New Jersey Medical School and the School of Health Professions, went to Saint Benedict's Prep School's health professions fair, where hundreds of 7th to 12th graders got a chance to talk with our faculty and third-year student Adriana Atienca about dental school and careers in dentistry.



### September

Associate Professor of Orthodontics Anil Ardeshta was named the president of the American Association of Orthodontists Society of Educators.



### December

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Department Chair Vincent Ziccardi's "Trigeminal nerve injuries in oral and maxillofacial surgery: a literature review" became one of most read articles of *Frontiers of Oral and Maxillofacial Medicine*.



### October

RSDMers volunteered at the Special Olympics New Jersey to help athletes have healthier smiles.



### November

Professor of Restorative Dentistry Peter DeSciscio received the William K. Collins Sr. Meritorious Service Award from the Commission on Dental Competency Assessments.







# leadership



Front row:

**Andrea West, MBA**

Chief Operating Officer

**Steven Morgano, DMD**

Chair, Department of Restorative Dentistry

**Madhu Mohan, DMD**

Interim Chair, Pediatric Dentistry  
& Community Health

**Emily Sabato, EdD**

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

**David Briss, DMD**

Chair, Department of Orthodontics

**Vincent Ziccardi, DDS, MD**

Chair, Department of Oral and Maxillofacial  
Surgery and Associate Dean of Hospital Affairs

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**Nathalie Scarpa-Lota, DMD**

Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs

**Craig Hirschberg, DDS**

Chair, Department of Endodontics

**Rosa Chaviano-Moran, DMD**

Associate Dean for Admissions

**Kim Fenesy, DMD**

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Dean

**Janine Fredericks-Younger, DMD**

Associate Dean for Student Affairs and  
Associate Dean for Graduate Programs

**Vincent Nacco**

Chief Financial Officer

Back row:

**Andrew Sullivan, DDS**

Chair, Department of Periodontics

**Narayanan Ramasubbu, PhD**

Associate Dean for Research

**Herminio L. Perez, DMD, MBA, EdD**

Assistant Dean for Campus Life

**Travis Gant, MS**

Director of Information Systems & Technology

**Michael Conte, DMD, MPH**

Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs

**Joan Liljegren, MEd**

Senior Director of Development

**Steven Singer, DDS**

Chair, Department of Diagnostic Sciences

NOT PICTURED:

**Daniel Fine, DMD**

Chair, Department of Oral Biology

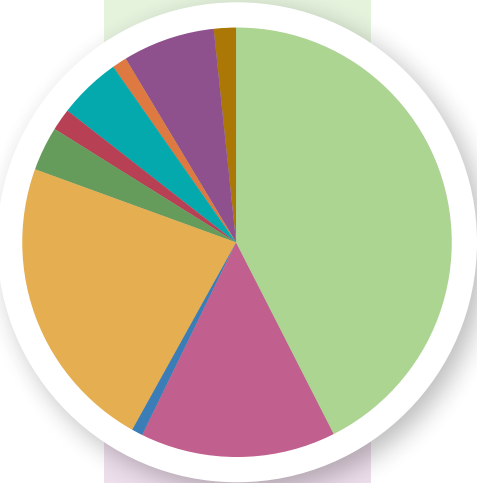
**Georgios A. Kotsakis, DDS, MS, PhD**

Assistant Dean for Clinical Research and  
Director of Research



# Financials

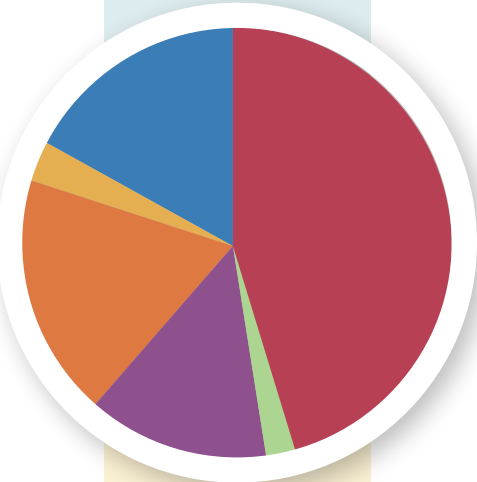
## Revenues \$97,820,170.61



	2023 ACTUAL	PERCENT
Tuition and Fees	\$41,603.18	42.5%
State Paid Fringe Revenues	\$14,442.28	14.8%
Endowments, Investments, Contributions, and Gifts *	\$925.32	0.9%
Net Patient Service Revenues	\$21,870.46	22.4%
Housestaff Recoveries	\$3,215.17	3.3%
Affiliate Revenues	\$1,876.33	1.9%
Recoveries of Direct Grant Expense	\$4,569.24	4.7%
Indirect Cost Recoveries	\$1,098.39	1.1%
State Appropriations and Allocated University Support	\$6,731.05	6.9%
Other	\$1,488.75	1.5%
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$97,820.17</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\*In FY24, RSDM received \$657,224 gift-in-kind donations, which are reflected in the total above.

## Expenses \$97,686,719.10



	2023 ACTUAL	PERCENT
Salaries and Wages	\$44,333.50	45.4%
Housestaff Salaries	\$2,245.64	2.3%
Fringe Benefits	\$13,524.80	13.8%
Non-salary	\$18,122.39	18.6%
Transfers	\$3,018.25	3.1%
Central Costs	\$16,442.13	16.8%
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$97,686.72</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



### Let's stay in touch

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