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# A Letter from the Editors



Dear Readers,

Our names are Guiselle Murillo and Stephanie Peacock and we are thrilled to serve as UCLA ASDA's Newsletter Chairs for the 2020-2021 Academic Year. Leeway Space is the pre-dental companion newsletter of UCLA School of Dentistry's student-run newsletter, The Diastema, and we are excited to introduce the fourth annual issue. Whether you have just decided to pursue a career in dentistry or recently hit the submit button on your dental school application, we hope Leeway Space will provide you with advice, resources, and encouragement that will help you reach your dreams of becoming a dentist. We understand how hectic the pre-dental journey can be, especially now more than ever before, which is why we have chosen to share experiences from your fellow pre-dental peers and remind you that you are not alone.

In this issue, you will find several personal experiences from your fellow colleagues on topics, such as serving underserved communities through Care Harbor and CDA Cares, detailing favorite pre-dental memories, and more. We hope these articles will support you and guide you, allowing you to enjoy each step of the process.

We encourage you to get involved with the vast opportunities of our ASDA Pre-dental Committee and consider writing for our Fall issue, even if you are not a pre-dental at UCLA! Again, we welcome you to Leeway Space and remember UCLA ASDA is here to help you reach your career goals.

Warmly,  
Guiselle Murillo & Stephanie Peacock  
*Guiselle Murillo Stephanie Peacock*  
UCLA ASDA Newsletter Committee Chairs

## A MESSAGE from the PRE-DENTAL OUTREACH CHAIRS

Hello, Pre-Dental Students!

On behalf of UCLA ASDA Pre-Dental Outreach, we wanted to congratulate you all on deciding to pursue dentistry! You have chosen a path with endless opportunities and incredible potential.

As second years at UCLA School of Dentistry, we are so excited to provide pre-dental resources such as tutoring services, laboratory workshops, and valuable information to guide you on your journey to dental school. During this difficult time, we hope to still be a great source of information through online lecture series, active question and answer sessions and Zoom Shadow Days. We hope you enjoy the Summer 2020 issue of Leeway Space, a publication written for pre-dental students, by pre-dental students! In this newsletter, you'll delve into the experiences of other pre-dents, just like you.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Le and Alexa Lee  
*Elizabeth Le Alexa Lee*



# Spirit in the Wind



By Susu Le

Navigating on the path towards dental school can be very difficult, especially at a large school with so many other amazing students. It's easy to feel lost in the crowd - just another spirit in the wind. In my first two years of college, I struggled with worrying if what I was doing was "enough." I would hear about my friends' involvement in numerous clubs and part-time jobs, and I questioned if I should be doing more. At these times, I would remember what my English teacher once taught me:

*"You don't have to walk the right path, you just have to make the path that's right for you."*

I thought back to my own involvements and how happy they made me: teaching children and staying in touch with my Vietnamese culture through dance. I reasoned that enjoying college was important to me and piling on more extracurriculars would just increase my stress, making me less happy. Just like there are multiple ways to solve a physics problem, there is not one right path to get into dental school; everyone has their own "right" path. This lesson has helped me immensely in the past years and improved my wellbeing, and I hope you are able to find some encouragement in my tips to you.

*Finding ways to destress, such as a new hobby, is crucial for mental wellness.* Academics, volunteering, shadowing, clubs, friends, family - it's very easy to be overwhelmed and overlook your health. Some activities I like to dedicate my free time to are painting, sewing plushies, and playing the piano. Make some time for yourself and discover what you are good at or really enjoy doing. Your hobbies allow you to stay in touch with your creativity and can help build your manual dexterity, which is beneficial for your future as an aspiring dentist.

*Another important factor in keeping stress levels low is time management.* I have been a big procrastinator in the past, which has caused me a lot of stress. I found that writing in a planner and setting reminders and time allotments for certain tasks has significantly reduced my stress levels and kept me on track.

*In addition to mental wellness, the pre-dental journey can take a heavy toll on physical health.* With hectic schedules, we often forget to prioritize sufficient sleep and a healthy diet. Taking care of your long-term health is imperative in living a happy life as a student. Learning this sooner than later will allow you to live longer and hopefully impact more lives in the future. This thought always came to my mind:

*"How will I take care of my future patients if I don't even take care of myself?"*

*Giving yourself breaks from studying* is also necessary to preserve your well-being. Exercise is a great way to spend your breaks as physical activity can stimulate the mind and decrease stress, resulting in more productivity. Going for a walk and working out at the gym are of course great ways to be physically active, but if you are low on time, there are some quick exercises you can do right at your desk! Some examples I do myself are chair dips, leg lifts, and seated cross-body crunches.

The next time you catch yourself feeling like just another spirit blowing in the wind, think about how that wind is actually carrying you on your own unique journey. The wind often changes direction, but you have the power to control it; it is up to you to steer it in the right direction. More importantly, make sure to prioritize both your mental and physical health along the way; we only have one body, so we need to take care of it in order to take care of others in the future.

*A Pathway to Hope and Restoration.*

# CARE HARBOR EMPOWERS COMMUNITIES

By Maria Bello Carillo

*¿Tio, esta bien?  
¿Como se siente?*

These were my immediate words to my uncle who was experiencing shortness of breath. A hardworking and generous man, who like many in LA county are excluded from essential health care services due to being uninsured. Witnessing my uncle experience anxiety and fear because he did not know what was occurring with his body, broke me to tears. The feeling of helplessness due to not having access to routine and preventive healthcare is a prominent issue that has affected some of my family members, and perhaps you or a family member have experienced such an episode as well.

*It's probably not serious and the pain will go away by itself.*

*I haven't seen a doctor in years.*

*The medications are too costly; I can barely afford groceries.*

*I know I need dental treatment, but it is out of my financial reach.*

These are all very likely challenging situations that many Angelenos find themselves in. Health care is a multifactorial and complex system that encompasses a myriad of disciplines and is aimed to provide holistic wellness for patients. Unfortunately, a number of social determinants of health exist amongst the most vulnerable communities, which hinders their ability to take charge of their own health and wellness. Health becomes a subsequent priority in many households, not intentionally, but because there are financial barriers and limited trustworthy and culturally competent resources that these communities can rely on. Notoriously, the need for medical attention has significantly heightened especially in these unprecedented and difficult times. Furthermore, research suggests that health insurance lowers financial distress and excessive out-of-pocket spending. As a result, people are more likely to engage in health screenings and diagnosis of chronic conditions, which reduces preventable comprised health statuses that would otherwise be more costly to treat. However, based on projections from the California Simulation of Insurance Markets model, in 2022 the Californian uninsured rate is anticipated to rise to 3.5 million in which disparities by race and ethnicity, income,



status, and age continue to persist among these people. How can these communities otherwise access healthcare without compromising other essential necessities?

In November 2019, I had the opportunity to volunteer with my sister at Care Harbor, a non-profit organization established in 2010 that provides gratuitous medical, dental, vision, and women's health services. Care Harbor annually organizes a 3-day clinic held at the Los Angeles Reef Exposition Center with the unqualified support from health care professionals, general volunteers and community partners such as UCLA Health. Care Harbor's historical outreach to continuously improve the gap in healthcare access amongst underserved, uninsured, and underinsured communities is enabling more people to be proactive about their health. This is important because people can now better understand how to prevent or manage prevalent chronic diseases such as type II diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. For a decade now, Care Harbor's mission of increasing access to sustainable care has been upheld through the implementation of prevention, intervention, treatment, and continuity of care. With dental care being one of the most sought services, cost is the top barrier for people not visiting the dentist more frequently and therefore this issue cannot be dismissed. Continuous postponed treatment can lead to more severe and more costly oral health consequences such as oral cancer, periodontitis, or tooth

decay. Efforts to promote oral health literacy and provide dental treatments such as oral cancer screenings, fillings, extractions, cleanings, sealants, partial dentures, and root canal surgery can significantly contribute to a person's confidence, preservation of a healthy smile, and increase prevention of more serious oral health conditions.

Prevention is one of the most effective methods to reduce future health care treatment costs across multiple disciplines. For example, Care Harbor clinic provides patients with the options of immunizations, nutrition education, insurance enrollment and oral health education. Intervention and treatment are critical to help mitigate any existing medical conditions so that the patient may be able to improve their quality of life and be restored to health and wellness. Moreover, Care Harbor uniquely implements continuity of care which plays a critical role in establishing access to routine health care for patients who currently do not have a medical, dental, or an ophthalmology home or who will need follow-up appointments. This will allow patients to not just participate in emergent treatment but will enable them to engage in routine comprehensive care.

Witnessing this transformation in allocation of health services to communities in need left me with an important lesson: communication

with every individual cannot be underestimated. I was a Spanish-language interpreter which allowed me to communicate critical information to patients which helped ensure that they understood their post care dental treatment guidelines and additionally increase the patient's health individual autonomy. The most compelling part of my experience as a Care Harbor volunteer was witnessing the relief and sense of content and gratitude from people. People were being relieved from pain, introduced to a healthier lifestyle, and gained more confidence and had an increased aptitude to manage their health. To date, LA Care Harbor clinic has remarkably served 28,204 patients and will continue to embark their mission.



One thing is clear: Health and wellness are integral to living a productive and quality lifestyle. We must also acknowledge the unending epidemic of social inequality. Social construct barriers such as socioeconomic status and geographic location play a major role in whether certain communities have an increased difficulty in mitigating health disparities. It is commendable that people are showing up to community clinics like Care Harbor despite many challenges, because it demonstrates that communities have a high interest to engage in health care services. Thankfully, Care Harbor in collaboration with compassionate health care professionals, volunteers and community partners is paving the way for enabling more people to take initiative and charge of their own health and combating delayed care by taking action that empowers Los Angeles communities.

## Questions to Ask AT YOUR INTERVIEW

You've been preparing yourself to get asked questions at your interview, but have you prepared any questions of your own to ask current students and faculty?

*What sets your school apart from others?*

What is your favorite thing about the program? What could be improved?

What do you wish you had known before coming here?

*What is the atmosphere like?*

Are the students competitive against each other or collaborative?

Do the students have a good relationship with faculty?

*What opportunities are there?*

Does your school offer offsite rotations? Are externships possible?

Are there many clubs and volunteer opportunities?

*Graduate preparedness?*

Are graduates prepared to work or do they tend to need a 1-year residency?

Is there education on how to run a private practice?



# FAVORITE PRE-DENTAL MEMORIES

*Meaningful experiences from pre-dentals*



By Astha Patel



By Jessica Mele

I entered UCLA with the intention of becoming a physician. However, there was the creative side of me that grew up painting and making pottery, that always wanted a career that was hands-on and involved artistry. My first and favorite encounter with dental waxing showed me the parallel between dentistry and art and greatly contributed to my decision to pursue dentistry.

During the winter break of my second year, I took a pre-dental waxing course taught by Mr. Mark Hunt, a pre-dental instructor at multiple UC universities. The really unique thing about this type of lab class was that I could learn about tooth anatomy by actually using the waxes to build teeth. This hands-on learning allowed me to practice my manual dexterity under pressure while I made each specific tooth wax-up.

This pre-dental waxing class was significant to me because it felt natural. As a new undergraduate, I had a hard time adjusting and constantly felt as if I was falling behind. When I was waxing, however, I felt the same calmness that I felt when I painted.

After this waxing course, I was able to become a teaching assistant for Mr. Hunt for the same pre-dental classes. It was through the Saturdays I spent helping him teach that I realized another part of dentistry that I loved: the teamwork and sense of community.

These memories with Mr. Hunt both as a student and as a teaching assistant are my favorite pre-dental memories because they were such positive experiences that helped me gain back the courage to learn without this fear of failing getting in the way. These experiences also surprised me by showing me how much I loved teaching and opened my mind to the possibility of teaching dental education.

One of my goals as an undergraduate student was to increase my involvement in community service. As a member of the Pre-Dental Student Outreach Program (PDSOP) at UCLA, I was introduced to a variety of opportunities, but my favorite event was assisting dentists at Care Harbor.

As a pre-dental volunteer, I was assigned to work at the station that assembled equipment for each patient. Throughout this process, I learned of numerous dental tools by assembling trays— information that translated to my later shadowing experience. It felt like my assembling team and I could help maintain the efficiency of the dental clinic by ensuring all dentists had sufficient supplies to accommodate their patients' needs.

Working as a volunteer at Care Harbor also allowed me to meet like-minded individuals. I remember one volunteer dentist told me he had been volunteering for Care Harbor ever since the free clinic had opened in 2010. His dedication to aiding the underserved community was inspiring to me, as his values deeply resonated with how I would personally like to carry out my dental career: always making time to give back to as many people as possible.

Volunteering at Care Harbor not only taught me practical knowledge about dental supplies, but, most importantly, exposed me to dentistry in action and fueled my motivation to become a dentist. Watching dental procedures in person and providing free healthcare to underserved communities was a motivating and touching experience for me, because I knew my participation was benefitting the health of individuals. Making a difference in the health of others was a very rewarding and I am excited for what the dental field has to offer and to ultimately give back to my community.



# MY PRE-DENTAL JOURNEY

*By Austin Nahouray*

My pre-health journey began in high school, where I established a pre-health organization at my school. I had an interest in healthcare so I organized presentations with healthcare professionals and developed a broadened interest in many aspects of the healthcare field. Ultimately, dentistry is what interested me.

With the start of my undergraduate education, I was faced with a small dilemma. After researching the topic, I had found to my own surprise that dental schools did not require a science degree to be a competitive applicant. This was a significant point in my academic career, as I found a way to incorporate both my passion for healthcare and my interest in understanding the roots and past of our current health system together. I began looking for a program that would be able to provide me with the integration I was looking for. Eventually, I decided the best match for me was UCLA's History program, particularly because it allows students to gain a general understanding of the progression of history while focusing on particular spheres of interest. In my junior year,

I placed an emphasis in my coursework on the history of science, medicine, and technology which has helped me blend my two areas of interest.

Along my journey, I have had a few experiences that have further exposed me to healthcare. Joining the Care Extender Program at several UCLA Hospitals, which allows volunteers to experience healthcare through patient and staff contact, showed me that I really enjoy communicating with patients. I began to look for other opportunities in healthcare and shadowed dentistry, which led me to look for research opportunities in the field. After a lot of searching, I applied for an opening here at UCLA School of Dentistry and began helping in Dr. Shetty's research laboratory, which focuses on the integration of artificial intelligence in electronic toothbrushes. It has been invaluable to gain exposure to both the clinical and research aspects of dentistry. These experiences have truly molded me into an enthusiastic pre-dental student and I am excited more than ever to start my next journey as a dental student.



## HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT DENTAL SCHOOL?

### USE YOUR INTERVIEW

How did you feel at your interview? Were the students and faculty nice and welcoming? Do they have pride for their school?

### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Don't underestimate how much location plays a role in your quality of life (cities offer many fun things to do) but also your patient pools (affluent zip codes are less likely to have many patients for you). Weather may affect your motivation to go to school work.

### CAMPUS AND HOUSING

Schools with a campus, library, and graduate housing give you places to congregate and build a social life at your school. Community is crucial!

### ACADEMIC VS CLINICAL? SPECIALTY VS GENERAL?

"Clinical"-focused schools offer a lot of hands-on experience, but "academic"-focused schools provide plenty of research opportunities, which are especially important for the academia- and specialty-bound students. Schools with many specialties allow you to learn from the experts of the field and expose you to specialties you may like to join, while schools lacking specialties may give you more opportunity to do "harder" procedures and focus on creating a solid general dentist.

### COST OF ATTENDANCE

Last but not least, don't underestimate the impact of THIS!

# What is

By Minchen Hsieh



# CDA CARES?

For some people, a life with daily dental pain is a normal life. According to the National Association of Dental Plans, about 5 million Californians are not covered by dental insurance. The end goal of CDA's (California Dental Association) "CDA Cares" event is providing free dental treatments to people of low socioeconomic status and helping them smile again. CDA Cares is sponsored by individual donors, government grants, and private dental supply companies. There are approximately 25,000 volunteers each year, including dental professionals, dental students, and community volunteers. Every 6 months for a couple days at a time, CDA Cares is held in either Northern or Southern California in locations intended to reach and serve as many people in need as possible. At the moment, CDA Cares offers dental treatments that do not require multiple appointments, such as extractions, fillings, root canal therapy, and dentures. These treatments are provided in different stations, after a patient has been assessed and treatment planned in triage. More often than not, many patients that come to the event find out that they have more severe oral health problems than they initially thought.



## THE COVID-19 CHALLENGE

In this year, 2020, the biggest challenge CDA Cares faces is COVID-19. Firstly, CDA Cares, originally scheduled for July 17-18, 2020 in Long Beach, has been postponed. There is a shortage of dentist volunteers and PPE (personal protective equipment) that make it difficult for CDA Cares to safely conduct their services.

Now more than ever, people count on events like CDA Cares in these challenging times due to pandemic-related rises in unemployment and furloughed employees. For this reason, the CDA is continually monitoring the news and announcements from Governor Newsom for any changes with the well-being of the volunteers, partners, and patients in mind. The CDA is looking for new ways to help support the oral health of Californians during this difficult time, and updates on this will be found in the CDA Cares Facebook page.

## DENTAL STUDENT MEMORIES FROM CDA CARES 2019

Nisha Choksi, CDA Representative of the class of 2022 at UCLA, saw that many people had a fear of dental treatment, but was surprised how experienced dentists could magically calm patients down by showing empathy and understanding while simultaneously performing a dental procedure.

Another CDA Cares dental student volunteer, Donghyun (Don) Kim, shared his experience helping in dental triage with treatment planning. He saw a patient with a denture that had a broken front tooth that came in at the end of the day when there were no materials left to make a denture. The patient explained that she couldn't afford the expense of the treatment from any private clinic, so CDA Cares was her last hope. The covering dentist reached out to one of his labs that agreed to repair her denture free of charge. The patient was in tears, thankful for their generosity.

From these anecdotes, it's clear CDA Cares plays a big role in positive student experiences and making dentistry accessible to people of lower socioeconomic status.

*Now you might be asking...*

## "WHAT HAS CDA CARES ACHIEVED?"

At CDA Cares's most recent event in San Bernardino...

Procedures completed free of charge: **10,412**

Dollars provided in dental care: **\$1,400,000**

People in need served: **1,626**

Thanks to all the volunteers, CDA Cares has treated and changed the lives of **30,186 people** thus far, and is dedicated to aiding more in the future.

## PRE-DENTAL STUDENT BENEFITS FROM CDA CARES

CDA Cares provides many great opportunities for pre-dental students like myself, the first one being networking. Pre-dental students can meet many dental student volunteers from various dental schools and ask them questions at the post-event social. The second benefit is the chance to converse with practicing and retired dental professionals to learn from them about real-world dentistry, and possibly find opportunities for research or shadowing. Last but not least, by participating in CDA Cares, we gain first-hand experience of organized dentistry in our communities by seeing the "behind-the-scenes" reality of dental care for low income patients. Pre-dental students can sign up for different stations on different days, which means we can shadow different specialties just within a couple of days. One can work with oral surgery on the first day and with endodontics the next day.

Overall, CDA Cares represents an invaluable opportunity for pre-dental students to learn about the dental community and dentistry itself. If you are a pre-dental student seeking exposure to dentistry in low income communities, I encourage you to look into CDA Cares and participate in other CDA events with an open mind.

