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Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC

[3/5/2021]



BI-WEEKLY DEAN'S MESSAGE

Dear USC Dentistry Community:

Like many, I am heartened to see conditions surrounding the coronavirus begin to improve, with infection rates and deaths in L.A. County coming down over the past several weeks. Of course, this (rare) good news in this pandemic is reason to feel optimistic, but we must still stay vigilant, taking all of the proper precautions, with or without having been vaccinated. Speaking of vaccinations, you probably saw

recently that USC expanded the populations eligible for the vaccine. If you haven't yet received your vaccine and want to know if you're eligible, visit keckmedicine.org/coronavirus-vaccine and, of course, be on the lookout for further news from the university concerning vaccination availabilities, etc.

Last week, our **Office of External Relations and Student Life** partnered with the **Student National Dental Association** to host a virtual USC Black Alumni Panel in honor of Black History Month. The freewheeling discussion between Black alumni and students covered everything from finding the right mentor to overcoming adversity in dental school to eradicating overall inequities in our healthcare system. These types of conversations are so important as we continue to push for a more equitable profession —and ultimately, society — and I hope to see even more of these types of interactions moving forward. I would like to thank the alumni who took time out of their busy lives to participate, including **Drs. Christopher Acone, Danielle Brown, Joshua Golden, Amber Parker and Lenise Yarber**. I'd also like to thank **Ms. Danielle Barr** and **Mr. Bryce Merryman** for finding these superstar alumni to share their wisdom with our students.

It's no secret that Ostrow has some of the nation's best and brightest dental students. Although I'm reminded of that often when working with our students, this excellence has really been on display recently, with USC dental students winning regional and national contests. First up, **Ms. Oluwaferanmi (Feranmi) Balogun DDS '24** earned an award for her entry into the Clifton O. Dummett Sr. Essay Competition, where predoctoral students from a number of universities around the nation were invited to compose a 750-word essay addressing diversity and race in dentistry. In her award-winning essay, Feranmi spoke of the need for underrepresented minorities to effect the changes they want to see in society. You can read [her essay here](#). Please join me in congratulating Feranmi on this honor.

Secondly, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate **Mr. George Parisi DDS '24, Ms. Madalyn Addis DH '21, Ms. Anita Alaverdyan DDS '24 and Mr. Sebastien Darbouze DDS '23**, who all participated on winning teams in this year's "I Have an ADEA" (formerly the hackathon) competition. In this annual competition, now in its fourth year, students from across the West Coast were tasked to design dental education curriculum based on the theme of teledentistry. This year's event was hosted virtually at Ostrow and was organized by **Ms. Nicole Kawakami DDS '22**. There were seven teams competing, and our students (mixed with students from other universities) were on the first-, second- and third-place teams. Congratulations to all of you!

Last week, several of our students took part in CDA's Advocacy Day, where they met with Assemblymembers Sydney Kamlager and Reggie Jones-Sawyer to discuss everything from COVID relief funding to vaccine administration to taxing sugary beverages. The students who participated were **Ms. Aida Dadashzadeh DDS '23, Mr. Jacob Gurstein DDS '23, Mr. Iman Nilforushan DDS '23, Mr. Samuel Sheridan DDS '23 and Ms. Anna Zurek DDS '23**. While we're on the topic of advocacy, our pediatric residents **Dr. Letitia Edwards PEDO '22, Dr. Ella Saeed PEDO '21, Dr. Shivani Keshav, PEDO '21, Dr. Stephen O'Donnell, PEDO '21**, along with Program Director **Dr. Alexander Alcaraz**, took part this week in the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Virtual Pediatric Oral Health Advocacy Conference, where they spoke with lawmakers about loan repayment grants for dental educators; requiring private insurance companies to cover all medically necessary procedures, including dental care for children with craniofacial anomalies; and providing additional financial support to provide comprehensive dental treatment for children and the frail elderly using general anesthesia. It's inspiring to see our students and residents finding and using their voices to effect real legislative change in the dental profession — a skill they'll need to use long into their dental careers.

With that, I would like to wish you all a nice, relaxing weekend. As always, stay safe, healthy and Fight On!

Avishai

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