

U^{OF}T DENTISTRY

TONGUE-TIE
SURGERY

PHD GRADS

CLINIC 2
DONORS



**HOW
MISINFORMATION
DISRUPTS
DENTISTRY** ▶ PAGE 10



U^{OF}T DENTISTRY

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Illustration: Doug Pantton

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MESSAGE
FROM THE
ACTING DEAN

LOOKING AHEAD

Many of you will have already seen the communication to inform you that dean Anil Kishen is on leave. The University of Toronto has launched an investigation into a recent incident and he has committed to participating fully. I am serving as acting dean in his absence.

The University and the Faculty take this matter very seriously. We know that this incident has negatively impacted U of T community members and others in the broader community. We will update you as we navigate next steps.

Looking ahead at the Faculty and our plans for the future, this year we will break ground on an ambitious renovation of Clinic 2, our main undergraduate teaching clinic. This state-of-the-art facility will be possible because of the generous support of our alumni and community. Thank you to everyone who has donated to name operatories — you are helping build the future of this Faculty.

This issue of *U of T Dentistry* explores the challenge of misinformation and how it impacts dental practices. It's a

current concern that's likely to be part of the profession's future, too. The situation is complex, with patients more informed and engaged in their health than ever — a good thing — but they're also collecting inapplicable or incomplete information. Dentists must tread carefully as they share evidence-based information while preserving trust and therapeutic relationships.

Misunderstandings have also plagued the rollout of the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP). This is a unique program we're all still learning to navigate. The CDCP has presented challenges, but it promises to transform Canadians' oral health and their understanding of the value of dental care.

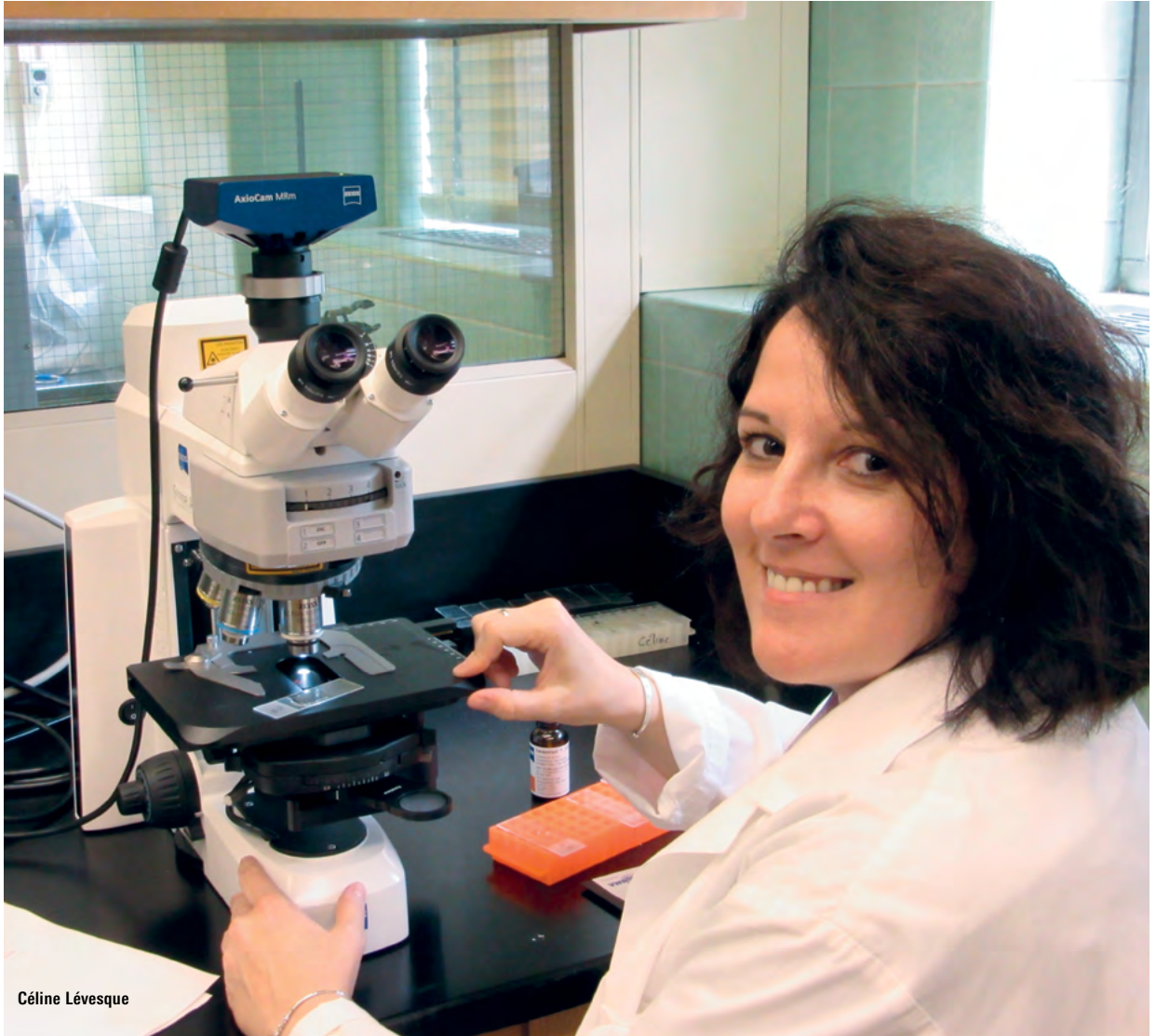
I recognize that this is a difficult time for our Faculty and the U of T

Dentistry community. We remain committed to providing an inclusive and respectful learning environment for all as we navigate a positive future together. ▀

ACTING DEAN LAURA TAM 8T5, 9T3 MSC D

We remain committed to providing an inclusive and respectful learning environment for all as we navigate a positive future together

UP FRONT



IT'S SYNBIOTIC

U of T Dentistry professor Céline Lévesque has received a \$615,826 Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) grant to study how to prevent early childhood caries with synbiotics. This combination of probiotics and prebiotics works more effectively than the former alone, as probiotics do not stay in the mouth for long.

Caries affect up to 90 per cent of school-aged children worldwide. The main cause is frequent sugar consumption, which disrupts the natural balance of bacteria in the mouth.

Lévesque and her team, including professor Siew-Ging Gong, discovered that *Streptococcus salivarius*, a friendly bacteria naturally found in the mouth and breast milk, can be used to make an effective synbiotic that could help prevent that bacterial imbalance and, in turn, caries.

“We propose to develop a mixture comprising live probiotic bacteria and natural or synthetic food ingredients to modulate the microbiome to benefit the host,” says Lévesque, who is also working with professors from the University of Hong Kong and the University of Alberta.

The project will screen substrates that promote beneficial bacterial growth, study probiotic mechanisms and demonstrate health benefits in a rodent caries model.

“Oral health is vital for basic functions, yet oral diseases — especially dental caries — are the most widespread health conditions affecting humans,” says Lévesque. “In many countries, the unequal distribution of oral health professionals and facilities makes it even harder for these communities to access care.”

Rather than developing traditional dental treatments — which are often unavailable or unaffordable in underserved communities — the project aims to create a probiotic-based solution that can be combined with everyday foods. Organizations such as Yoba for Life could potentially help with getting such enhanced foods out to people.

“Our ultimate vision is advancing science to improve lives and bring healthier smiles worldwide,” says Lévesque. “We want to reduce the global burden of dental diseases.” ■

UNTYING TONGUE TIES

When a newborn can't feed and the family suspects ankyloglossia — or tongue tie, where the tongue's lingual frenulum is short or thick — the parents may request a frenotomy. (Lip ties have similar issues and fixes.)

However, U of T Dentistry associate professor Hashim Nainar says there is no evidence that surgery helps most infants with breastfeeding now or speech problems later. “The surgery does work, but it is required only for a very small number of babies.”

Nainar has published a patient decision aid in the journal *Paediatrics & Child Health* that uses graphics and simple language to guide parents as they consider what to do. He also wrote a letter in the *European Archives of Paediatric Dentistry* calling frenotomy a “last resort.”

The procedure can be costly, may not be covered by insurance and carries risks. In 2021, a six-week-old baby in London, Ont., went into shock after a frenotomy; in 2023, a four-week-old died immediately following the procedure in Montreal. The Canadian Academy of Pediatric Dentistry now recommends lactation consultants, pediatricians and dentists work together and offer surgery only after trying other interventions.

A 2017 Canadian study showed ankyloglossia diagnoses increased 229 per cent and frenotomies 290 per cent between 2002 and 2014. “The surgery is usually very safe,” says Nainar, with complications in 14 per 100,000 procedures. But, with more surgeries, there will inevitably be more babies with adverse reactions.

He stresses that doing tongue-tie surgeries without strong justification “may contribute to a negative perception of dentistry. Personally, I don't think it's worth the risk.” ■



Photo: Ashley Nicole

COOKING WITH DENTISTRY

A alum Liz Worndl 2To was a finalist on season eight of TV cooking show *MasterChef Canada*, temporarily trading in her white coat for a white apron.

“It’s been a dream of for a long time — I’m a shameless *MasterChef* superfan,” she says. “It’s so inspiring to see home cooks put themselves out there and pursue their dreams.”

Worndl says cooking and dentistry rely on similar skills. “Ingredients are usually larger than teeth, but it’s the same concept.”

Looking ahead, she plans to keep up both. “Dentistry can be so technical and stressful, and having side passions allows me to be my best self. My dream is to continue to share my creations.”



Liz Worndl on MasterChef Canada

Photo: Courtesy of MasterChef Canada



William Mills with Mickey Mantle

Photo: Dick Loeck/Toronto Star via Getty Images

JAYS LEGACY

Back in 1976, when Major League Baseball added a Toronto team, young Toronto dentist William Mills 6T4, 6T7 Dip Perio entered the public-naming contest. He was one of 153 who suggested the now-iconic name “Blue Jays,” and won the draw to be the grand prize winner.

Nearly 50 years later, although the Toronto Blue Jays fell just slightly short of claiming the 2025 World Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers, Mills says he couldn’t be prouder.

“The team played with heart and gave it everything they had. Win or lose, they brought the city and the country together as our national team and I’ll forever proudly shout ‘Go Jays go!’”



ALUMNI SURVEY

Complete our annual alumni survey by April 30, 2026, and be entered to win one of five \$50 Amazon gift cards

HONOURING GIVING BACK



Photo: Gustavo Toledo Photography

Susanna Chow, Cheryl Lee and Greg Anderson

Three outstanding volunteers have been honoured with Arbor Awards from the Faculty of Dentistry.

Greg Anderson 8T6 generously gives his time as a volunteer on the admissions committee, where he brings decades of clinical and teaching experience to the selection of future oral health professionals. “Interview day represents such an important event in the lives of the candidates, which may very well change the course of their future,” he says. “To be recognized as making a contribution to the education and futures of so many people means a great deal to me.”

Susanna Chow 9T2 is a long-standing admissions committee interviewer, where she has contributed her time, insights and

mentorship. “I always wanted to be able to serve the community that I love that helped to shape me into who I am today,” she says. “I never expected to receive any awards but was nicely surprised when I learned that I’ve been recognized with this prestigious award. I am truly blessed with the ability to give to others.”

Cheryl Lee 7T3 has shown exceptional dedication to the DDS class of 1973, organizing reunions and mobilizing class giving. “Dentistry has afforded me a wonderful professional, personal and community life for the last 52 years,” says Lee. “The recognition of the Arbor Award will be an asterisk in my life’s calling. By joining dental volunteer missions, I was able to follow my mother’s adage: work before pleasure — combining work and pleasure!”

FORGIVING LOANS

Graduating DDS student Noor Saiyed will soon decide what's next. She could stay in Toronto with all the benefits of urban life but in a tight employment market — or work outside the city.

“In a rural setting, as a fresh graduate, you're able to practise more, and more broadly, and take on a higher level of responsibility early on,” says Saiyed, who did an observership in Sault Ste. Marie last summer.

Rural practices are keen to hire new dentists, often offering a high percentage of collections and relocation and retention bonuses. Plus, now the federal government will forgive a portion of student loans to dentists who work for at least a year in a community of under 30,000 people.

The program offers \$8,000 off in year one and that grows annually. Over five years, dentists treating patients in small-town settings can get \$60,000 subtracted from their federal loans.

Joel Rosenbloom, director of student life — who worked in Africa after graduation and is involved in the Toronto Addis Ababa Academic Collaboration — thinks this incentive might influence students who are “on the edge.”



Photo: Benyamin Bohloui on Unsplash

“There is always going to be a large cohort who don't want to leave Toronto,” he says. “And there will always be a small cohort who want to do something different.”

Rosenbloom says loan forgiveness could make rural work more popular. “We need to turn this into a true and real option,” he says. “I think this program will have an impact. That's nothing but a good thing.”

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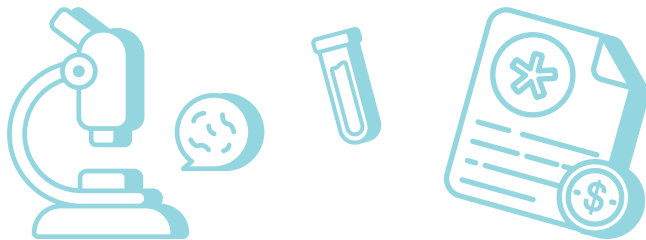
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FACULTY OF DENTISTRY**

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Dental Education**

CIHR AWARDS EARNED



Two impactful research projects at the Faculty of Dentistry have brought in nearly \$3 million over five years from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

Associate professor Marco Magalhaes (OT9 PhD, IT5 MSc OP/OM) will leverage \$1.06 million to see if the receptor Fn14, which is related to the cytokine TWEAK, helps abnormal cells invade tissue. Understanding this pathway can

help assess which oral lesions could become cancer.

Associate professor Massieh Moayed is the co-principal investigator of a research study that has earned \$1.3 million. It will explore fatty acid amide hydrolase (FAAH), an enzyme responsible for metabolizing anandamide, a cannabis-like compound, and its potential role in alleviating chronic pain and preventing opioid use disorder. ■

UPDATE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

Stay connected with what's happening at the Faculty and with your fellow alumni and friends in the community! Update your email address at dentistry.alumni.utoronto.ca/my-services



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF DENTISTRY

THINKING ABOUT GRAD SCHOOL?

Attend the U of T Dentistry Graduate Open House

May 9 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 124 Edward St.

- 1:1 interactions with program directors and prospective research supervisors
- Talk to program residents
- Case presentations from current students
- Clinic and research facilities tours
- Student presentations from the 3-Minute Thesis competition



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WORD *of* MOUTH

Misunderstandings about oral health are on the rise.
This is how dentists are dealing with it

BY DIANE PETERS
ILLUSTRATION BY DOUG PANTON



Three years ago, the team at Yonge Eglinton Dental in Toronto got help creating video content for its website. Everyone liked it, so they did more, posting clinic tours, staff introductions and health discussions on Instagram and TikTok.

“We use video as a springboard to talk about something we think is important and try to share information,” says clinic partner Randy Fisher, a University of Toronto engineering grad who studied dentistry at Western University. He often stars in clinic videos while his dentist partners and other members of staff take their turns as well.

Fisher recently shared his own journey with having an extraction, orthodontics and veneers, and has done segments on “wisdom on wisdom teeth,” the limitations of brushing with activated charcoal and the myth that baby teeth are not important.

He’s found that misunderstandings about dentistry are becoming increasingly common. “I’d say once a day someone asks me about something their friend said or did, or something they researched online,” says Fisher. “People have more information now. Not all of it’s accurate or applicable.” Sharing evidence-based guidance has served as a marketing strategy for the clinic, but also triggered thoughtful conversations online and in the office.

Meanwhile, other dentists and dental associations have been tackling dental myths via content on their websites and private conversations — any opportunity to curb misconceptions related to daily oral



hygiene, programs such as the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) and the risks of procedures.

“Misinformation is a really big thing,” says Faculty professor Laura Dempster 7T7 Dip DH, 8Tr BSc D, who conducts research and teaches on communication and behavioural sciences. “Information is far more available than it used to be.” Companies marketing products, social media influencers hyping theories and those with political agendas disseminating disinformation — deliberately misleading information — make for a confusing world.

“There are a lot of competing thoughts out there, and our role as practitioners is to streamline and try to educate,” says Fisher. It’s now just a part of the job of being a healthcare provider to have to cope with this, often daily. The University of Toronto is now offering a course on the subject that’s open to students from all its health faculties as misinformation impacts dentistry and well beyond.



Not so long ago, dental patients would consent or not to treatment based on what they were told in the chair, perhaps after consulting a pamphlet.



Dempster's study of social media use in orthodontic patients found many looked to social media for treatment information and had realistic expectations around esthetics but overblown expectations related to functional impacts

Now, easy access to digital information means many show up for appointments with a sense of how much braces cost and the recovery time for a root canal. However, on their digital research travels, they've often been exposed to less-than-helpful materials and many can't distinguish solid oral health tips from unproven treatments boosted by conspiracy-theory-driven hype. They might be open to believing even outlandish ideas, as Dempster notes that mistrust in institutions, governments and healthcare professionals has spiked since the pandemic.

"People are misinformed for many reasons that were not there 10 or 15 years ago," says Aviv Ouanounou oTo, associate professor, teaching stream at the Faculty. "One of them is social media. It really amplifies things." He recently spent time answering questions about dental health from a woman in her 90s. "She says she saw it on TikTok. So, it's not only for the young," he notes.

People are somewhat wary of what they see online. A 2024 survey found 46.4 per cent of people who looked to social media for oral health information were unsure of how much they trusted it, with 42.3 per cent mistrusting what they saw and read. While most respondents visited the dentist when they had an oral health concern, 10.3 per cent followed the advice they read on social media instead.

Meanwhile, Dempster's study of social media use in orthodontic patients found many looked to social media for treatment information and had realistic expectations around esthetics but overblown expectations related to functional impacts on such things as eating and speech. "Some patients thought they'd breathe better, some patients thought they'd have a better career," says Dempster.

Digital information in general seems to sway people. A 2022 review study published in the *Canadian Journal of Dental Hygiene* looked at 13 previous reports on patients who seek oral health information online, with 11 of those studies concluding that media outlets influence perceptions. This is impacting all of health care. A 2025 survey from the Canadian Medical Association of more than 3,700 Canadians found 35 per cent avoided effective health treatments due to false information, with 31 per cent saying they followed medical information they found online over that of a health professional.



Dentistry might be particularly vulnerable to so-called fake news. "Dentistry triggers a lot of anxiety, a lot of fear in people," says Ouanounou. Worries about pain or being overcharged can entice people to seek workarounds, including around daily hygiene. He admits two minutes of brushing is challenging. "I'm a dentistry professor and sometimes I time myself. I do one minute and 20 seconds and I'm tired," he says. So, people assume brushing harder is better and some can be swayed to believe that diet and exercise can transform their oral health. Ouanounou says people have heard it's fine to avoid going to the dentist if they have other symptoms but not pain, plus they hear and believe that dental X-rays are dangerous.

Enticed by dental companies and influencers, patients will look to such toothpaste variations as hydroxyapatite, charcoal and purple pastes, or try oil pulling, all in hopes of bypassing traditional methods of good oral hygiene, or gaining other health benefits.

More dramatically, people may believe you can put aspirin directly on a painful tooth to fix it. "Aspirin is an anti-inflammatory and so your pain is supposed to go away. That's not true. In fact, it can cause damage, it can burn," says Ouanounou.

“As clinicians, we have been focused historically on trying to fix incorrect facts by educating ... You can't educate past misinformation

Some patients have also heard of remineralizing products, and believe they can just buy some, put it on their teeth and avoid getting caries drilled and filled, which is not true.

While working with orthodontic patients, Dempster heard about mewing, which suggests flattening your tongue against the roof of your mouth can lead to skeletal facial changes. “I’ve seen a TikTok on it in which you can’t even see what was really happening, and I watched it six times,” says Dempster. The American Association of Orthodontists warns that mewing cannot replace braces and messing with your tongue position can negatively impact teeth.

The much-criticized 2018 documentary *Root Cause* reinvigorated the unproven focal infection theory, which says bacteria is left behind after a root canal that can trigger heart disease or cancer — digital influencers routinely pick up the idea. The Canadian Dental Association (CDA), Canadian Academy of Endodontics and the Canadian Cancer Society have issued public statements to dispel the myth.

Meanwhile, the public has had to adjust to the CDCP. One CDA survey during rollout showed that nearly 30 per cent of people using the program were surprised by out-of-pocket costs. Ontario Dental Association (ODA) surveys have found that the main issue for dentists related to the program has been dealing with patient misconceptions.

“There’s been a lot of misinformation from the beginning,” says David Brown, president of the ODA, who recalls politicians mentioning free dental care. “It was never meant to be free.”

The CDCP keeps evolving, with changes to how the government calculates income eligibility and around covering lab fees and some procedures — Brown says approvals now take a month on average, with 70 per cent of preauthorizations for procedures being rejected. “We knew there were going to be concerns and problems, and we urged the government to iron out these problems before they expanded eligibility to the entire population,” says Brown of the ODA’s advocacy efforts. Fortunately,

Canadians are getting used to the CDCP, with recent surveys showing more people understand how the program works and that it is intended to subsidize the cost of dentistry.



Tackling misinformation in the dental office may entail addressing misunderstandings — but if patients are quietly avoiding care, dentists might not know what has happened. “The onus is on the clinician to talk about it,” says Dempster. She suggests dentists be detailed and clear when they present treatment plans and try to suss out expectations, which could reveal if the patient is buying into myths.

Jennifer Lake, assistant professor, teaching stream at the Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy, helped create and teaches the U of T interprofessional elective course Meeting People Where They’re At: Relationship-Centered and Evidence-Informed Approaches to Addressing Mis/Disinformation. She recommends healthcare professionals stay open as they talk to patients. “As clinicians, we have been focused historically on trying to fix incorrect facts by educating. Nowadays, we have to manage some of the cognitive and social issues, too. You can’t just educate past misinformation,” says Lake.

As part of the course, Lake and her colleagues have students role-play speaking to a patient who is not vaccinating because she believes mRNA shots contain trackers. In her own practice, she will sympathize with patients sharing non-evidence-based ideas. “That must be scary,” she will often say, finding common ground, such as wanting to keep one’s family safe. She will then try to discover which treatments they will accept.

Lake advocates for healthcare professionals to listen, take into account power dynamics and focus on small changes. “We’re all adults. And as adults, we can make bad decisions. I’m sure there are things I do that my family doctor would prefer I don’t.”



Ouanounou says that dentists should acknowledge education and power dynamic differences. “You have to speak to your patient in a respectful manner. And it’s OK if they don’t know the answers; they didn’t go to dental school.”

Dentists should do their best to stay up to date. “You have to be that reliable source and be confident in what you’re saying,” says Brown. “If you’re not sure, reach out to get the information you need.” Most of the dental associations publish patient-facing materials on common myths that can be tapped as resources.

Importantly, conversations should preserve trust. “We know that when you trust somebody, you’re more willing to accept what they say,” says Dempster. She’s studied trust in clinical relationships, and has found it can be lost easily, and you don’t usually know it’s happened. She’s discovered that healthcare providers who are empathetic and who have strong communication skills are considered more trustworthy.

Ironically, just as patients seek easy, affordable solutions to their oral health problems and grasp at misinformation as they do so, dentists must resist one-and-done solutions to patient education. It’s a long and iterative process that’s going to be different for everyone. Says Fisher, who has found an approach to patient communication that works for him, at least for now, “There are no quick fixes in life.” ■

FLUORIDE: THE CONTROVERSY THAT NEVER ENDS

Worries about fluoridated water just keep coming back

Last summer, the city of Calgary reintroduced fluoride to its drinking water after a 14-year gap, maintaining 0.7 mg/L of the mineral, as per Health Canada guidelines. The practice had been stopped in 2011 after 20 years of use.

Advocacy groups nudged the change forward, looking to University of Calgary research published in 2021 that showed that in a group of roughly 2,600 Grade 2 students in that city, 64.8 per cent had caries in their baby teeth. A mere three hours up the road in Edmonton, which fluoridates, 55.1 per cent of a comparable group of kids had caries. “That represents a significant amount of suffering, along with social and financial costs, that is unnecessary because caries are preventable,” says Lindsay McLaren, the professor of population and public health who led the research.

The direct comparison between the two cities offered yet another compelling piece of evidence of the public health value of fluoride. Yet, worries over fluoride come back again and again, and its use has been up for debate in recent years in such places as Windsor, Waterloo and Regina, while U.S. states Utah and Florida recently out-and-out banned it.

Currently, about 38 per cent of Canadians have access to municipally fluoridated drinking water. Fluoride has been heavily studied since it became used widely in the 1940s. The latest concern has been a possible connection between the mineral and lower IQ levels in children, which is not confirmed or shown to be causal.

McLaren says objections to fluoridation tend to follow three lines of concern: it’s not effective, it’s unsafe and it’s not ethical to give it to everyone in a community without their individual consent.

Associate professor Aviv Ouanounou thinks the cycle of debate will continue. “The fluoride argument hasn’t changed in the last 20 or 30 years. There will always be people who will keep arguing it.”

“In a way, these debates are a good thing,” says McLaren, who worries when the discourse gets dominated by misleading narratives. “We should be having these conversations as a society.”

TOP DEGREE, TOWERING IMPACT

A record cohort of fall 2025 graduating PhDs made oral and whole-body health discoveries

Last fall, the Faculty of Dentistry celebrated the graduation of one of the largest groups of PhD candidates ever, with eight students successfully defending their theses. The Faculty takes in an average of four new PhD students per calendar year — and about 23 are working on their advanced degrees now.

“This group of graduates is very special,” says Dentistry professor Laurent Bozec, associate dean, graduate education. This was the last of the COVID-19 pandemic cohorts, with many of these students embarking on research and studies during shutdowns. “Here we have graduate students that are extremely resilient, that went through one of the worst times in research environment history.”

They’re also notable for illustrating that dentistry research has far-reaching impact in both oral and overall health.

“The mouth is literally the shopping window of our body, and all facets of medical science have an outlet inside the mouth,” says Bozec, who is a physicist and recruits his

graduate students from an array of backgrounds. Research in dental faculties can touch on biomaterials, immunology, infections, cardiac and brain health and more.

One impressive fall 2025 PhD graduate, Imran Farooq, made a new discovery regarding Lyme disease and bone loss.

“Everyone who talks about Lyme disease only talks about muscular problems, arthritis, joint pain. These things are very common, but no one knows that bone loss occurs,” says Farooq, who is a trained dentist originally from Pakistan.

He completed a research-focused master’s in the U.K. and served as an assistant professor in Saudi Arabia before coming to Canada and joining the Faculty to study under associate professor Tara Moriarty, an expert on infectious diseases.

As Farooq conducted animal studies to assess bone loss in different parts of the body, he thought it ironic that, as a dentist, he discovered the alveolar bone experienced long-term damage after a Lyme disease infection. “We saw that long bone loss repairs after a certain period of time. But jawbone loss, it is continuous, it is progressive and it is not repairable.”

Imran Farooq

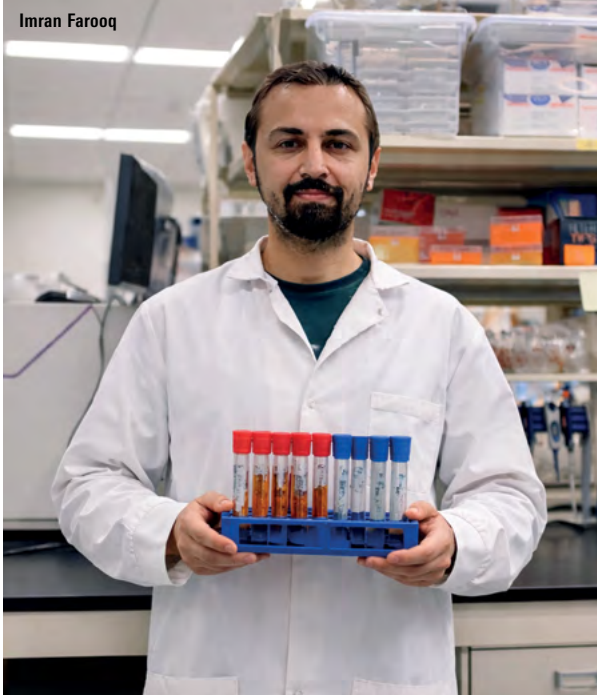


Photo: Courtesy Imran Farooq

He also found that jaw bone loss isn't directly caused by the spiral-shaped bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*, but by infection-induced inflammation driven by the cytokine IL-6, which suppresses bone-forming osteoblasts.

If further studies confirm this happens in humans, dentists and physicians may begin asking about a history of Lyme disease. As well, this finding adds to the urgency around developing a vaccine.

Farooq has been working in research and education since graduation, and has long-term plans for a career in health-related sciences. "This PhD has opened up avenues for me on the medical side as well, as I've done research on microbiology, immunology and bone health."

Also exploring bone — but how to regenerate it — is PhD grad Nadeen Mahmoud Meshry. She helped create a DNA-based hydrogel to aid developmental and acquired bone defects in healing. Since most bone grafts are made from human or animal materials, which can be rejected by the body, a synthetic alternative is ideal.

“There’s a lot of research and work that goes into dentistry. The patient does not see it, but it’s all-encompassing. The Faculty of Dentistry is probably one of the most translational faculties that exist

“At first, there were a lot of new techniques for me to learn,” says Meshry of her PhD. She worked under associate professor Karina Carneiro, with assistance from professor Christopher McCulloch 7T6, 8T2 PhD. “Karina was more on the biomaterials side and Chris was on the biology side, so I felt like both aspects of the project were very well covered.”

A challenge was developing a hydrogel that could help bones heal without degrading too quickly. Meshry eventually landed on a biomaterial that, when injected into rat cranial bones, led to bone formation 60 days after bone-damaging surgery — the animal testing and other parts of the research were conducted elsewhere as part of a multi-centre project.

Meshry continues in Carneiro’s lab as a postdoctoral fellow. In the future, she thinks DNA hydrogels could lead to even more research projects, such as an investigation into their underlying mechanisms.

After her postdoc, Meshry is not sure what’s next. A trained dentist from Egypt, she began teaching after graduation and then, via the Fulbright Foreign Student Program, did a master’s at the University of Pittsburgh. She came to Canada, following family and drawn by Carneiro’s research. She’s keen to pursue research along with teaching. “It’s something I still really enjoy,” she says of the latter.

As the eight new PhD grads from the Faculty look to the next phase of their scholarly endeavours, Bozec says he hopes they’ll spread the word that dentistry research has impact.

“There’s a lot of research and work that goes into dentistry. The patient does not see it, but it’s all-encompassing,” he says. “The Faculty of Dentistry is probably one of the most translational faculties that exist.”

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FALL CLASS OF 2025!

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Yehoshua Bendayan, MSc
Amina Bouzid, MSc OMFS
Kelsey Cale, MSc Pedodontics
Brittany Chin, MSc Pedodontics
Matthew Alexander Cormie, MSc

Marta da Cunha Lima Somaschini,
MSc OR
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Imran Farooq, PhD
Georgia Ekaterini Hadjis, PhD
Omar Khalil, MSc

Justin Zhixuan Lin, MSc Orthodontics
Anqi Liu, MSc
Nadeen Mahmoud Meshry, PhD
Matthew Ryan Mockford, MSc
Michel Sina Mounir, MSc Orthodontics
Braedan Robert Joseph Prete, MSc Perio
Madonna Rofaeel, MSc Orthodontics
Lauren Frances Rotondi, MSc Endodontics
Mina Vaez Ghasemi, PhD

Eva Volman, MSc Perio
Thien Duy Vuong, MSc Orthodontics
Kelsey Won, MSc OMFS
Fereshteh Sadat Younesi, PhD
Maryam Zanjiir, PhD
Haowei Zhao, PhD

Listings are as accurate as possible as of press time

WORLD- CLASS WONDERS

Introducing the 2026 Alumni of Influence recipients

Many dentists go the extra distance to provide excellent care. But the 2026 Alumni of Influence recipients have logged thousands of kilometres and countless volunteer hours each year to make a meaningful difference in Canada and around the world.

Their influence spans the globe and has led to changes related to technology, public health and access to care, among other essential elements of oral health care. Grab your passport and meet this year's honourees.



Photo: Stef & Ethan



→ PETER FRITZ 9T7,0T3 PHD

Periodontist, implant surgeon, futurist, healthcare leader, educator and entrepreneur Peter Fritz has a clear vision for what's next in health care. "I believe the future belongs to those who can move between disciplines, translate ideas and build bridges."

Fritz practises what he preaches. He divides his time between providing clinical care at his artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced periodontal practice in Fonthill, Ont., teaching at one of five different universities and doing curriculum creation, mentoring, research, regulatory work and speaking engagements. He's also starting an executive master of AI and digital business transformation to add to his PhD, MBA, two law degrees and DDS.

"The degrees aren't credentials," clarifies Fritz. "They're compasses. Each one has sharpened how I listen, how I lead and how I see around corners."

The breadth of his curiosity is matched only by the depth of his generosity. He canoed across Lake Ontario to raise \$16,000 for the Build Your Smile Dental Foundation in addition to serving on its board and participating in outreach

missions in Uganda. He volunteers on the AI and technology committee of the Royal College of Dentists of Canada and funds the Dr. Peter Fritz Prize for Transformative Teaching in Innovation, Law & Technology, an award for U of T law instructors, and has recently established a Lectureship in AI Enhanced Dentistry at the Faculty.

Fritz hasn't just travelled to all seven continents and the South Pole, he's also exploring digital tools and ethical AI in clinical care. "The question isn't, 'Will AI replace dentists?'" he says. "The better question is: 'What becomes possible when AI handles what AI handles best?'"

It all began at the Faculty of Dentistry. "U of T gave me not just a seat in the program, but a doorway into a world of clinical precision, research possibility and lifelong mentorship," he says. "The profession of dentistry gave me a platform. Now, I'm building platforms for others."

With dentistry as the starting point, he's showing how to face a rapidly changing, tech-forward future. "The clinicians who thrive won't be the ones who cling to certainty — they'll be the ones who stay curious, adaptable and humble enough to keep asking better questions."



→ SAIDA RASUL 7T8

Although Saida Rasul has treated countless patients over the years, one stands out. About a decade ago, she was working at the dental clinic of the Aga Khan University Hospital in Karachi, Pakistan, when a patient with oral cancer came in for care.

She was struggling to eat due to a hole in her mouth. Rasul sealed her palate with an obturator prosthesis, and the treatment allowed her to eat again, radically changing her quality of life. “The patient said, ‘All these years, I’ve suffered until I came to you,’” recalls Rasul.

The 1978 DDS grad had already impacted many lives over nearly two decades in general practice in Vancouver. Then, a breast cancer diagnosis inspired her to sell her practice and focus on her volunteer and development work. Through roles at Aga Khan University, she helped underserved communities by developing programs and training local people to provide care.

“I’m most proud of setting up preventive dental programs and training individuals in rural areas of East Africa, Pakistan and Afghanistan,” says Rasul. She ensures on-the-ground teams are versed in public health messaging around the importance of dental hygiene and the oral-cancer risks of chewing betel nut and gutka.

“One gains way more than one gives, and the learning and rewards are extremely fulfilling and magical”

Closer to home, Rasul has supported the BC Children’s Hospital Foundation, the Rotary Club, the Aga Khan Foundation and the United Way, where she helped earn an \$18-million provincial grant to expand early childhood programs. She has served on Simon Fraser University’s board of governors; as chair of the board she helped steward more than \$200 million in philanthropic and capital projects. She’s currently working on a fundraising campaign for the university’s new community family medicine program.

For her efforts, she has been honoured with the Order of British Columbia, the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal and an Honorary Doctor of Science from the University of Alberta and Simon Fraser University, among other honours.

Rasul will turn 75 this summer, so she’s ready to spend

more time with her grandkids, but continues working with Aga Khan University, mentoring graduates and serving on the board of Canadian Accredited Independent Schools.

While her work has impacted so many people in so many countries, she feels like she’s benefited the most. “One gains way more than one gives, and the learning and rewards are extremely fulfilling and magical.”



→ RICK CALDWELL 8T5

Rick Caldwell aptly calls himself a “purposeful adventurer.” This globe-trotter spent decades treating underserved populations in northern Ontario communities, including Moose Factory, Weenusk First Nation and Sioux Lookout. He also volunteers at free dental clinics in Latin America via Health Outreach and other non-profit organizations.

Caldwell warmly recalls treating five generations of families in Weenusk and doing essential dental work on such patients as the young daughter of a Guatemalan widow who had travelled hours to get to the clinic. “It really demonstrates how important this work is,” he says.

While he’s sold his private practice in New Liskeard, Ont., and stepped down from his staff dentist role at Temiskaming Hospital, Caldwell still has a calendar packed with adventures. This year, for instance, he’ll be leading a volunteer dental clinic in Guatemala, organizing other projects as the president of Health Outreach, and will go birding in Mongolia for fun.

Lynn Tomkins 8T1 lauds his approach to giving back. “Dr. Caldwell’s compassion and quiet advocacy for the needs of challenged communities demonstrates true altruism and volunteerism.”

As a committee member and former president of the Ontario Dental Association, Caldwell has championed access-to-care policies — earning its Barnabas Day Award for Distinguished Service — plus has done similar work at such organizations as the Temiskaming Dental Society and the Canadian Dental Association. Somehow, he has also found time for coaching community hockey and soccer, serving as a Scout leader and volunteering in community theatre.

Praised for his understanding approach as a mentor to countless dentists who accompanied him on outreach excursions, Caldwell says he’s honoured that they offered their time. “The biggest thing was having staff that believed in my vision and supported those projects in underserved places,” he says, noting his colleagues would leave their families to travel with him two to three times a year. “It was a big sacrifice for them.”

Caldwell credits the late Norman Levine 6To, 6T2 Dip Pedo, 6T7 MSc, a former acting dean of the Faculty, for originally encouraging him to work in northern Ontario, and U of T Dentistry for giving him a career that’s never stood still. “This career path has taken me all over the world and all over Canada. It’s been fabulous.” ■



Photo: Stef & Ethan

A TRIBUTE TO *TRAILBLAZERS*

Last September, the Faculty hosted the Champions and Changemakers dinner in celebration of our 150th anniversary. The evening hosted former deans, Campaign Cabinet members and other alumni and friends who have generously supported the school through philanthropy and leadership.

See more photos from the dinner at uoft.me/czdinner



Photos: Indigo Events

AN EVENING OF APPRECIATION



In honour of 150 years of dental education, instructors, program directors, donors and volunteers shared a celebratory evening recognizing their support. The evening served as a thank you to these individuals' incredible commitment to the school.

See more photos from the reception at uoft.me/dar2025



Photos: Jeff Gombier

WHO WE



OVER HALF of patients report **EITHER MODERATE OR SEVERE FOOD INSECURITY** — up from 44.3% in 2021 and compared to 20.7% of the general population



MORE THAN HALF of patients make less than \$40,000 — **ABOUT 1 IN 5 MAKE LESS THAN \$20,000** in after-tax income

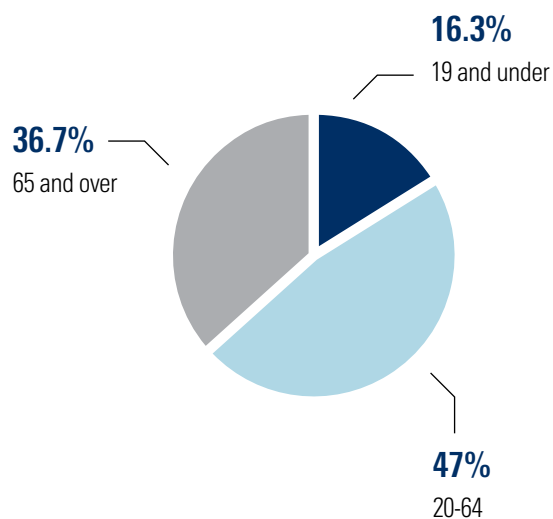


1 IN 5 ADULT patients receive **INCOME FROM SOCIAL ASSISTANCE OR WELFARE**



3/4 of patients over 65 receive **INCOME FROM OLD AGE SECURITY OR THE GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT**

PATIENT AGE



Only **15.3%** of patients report **VERY GOOD ORAL HEALTH**

26.2% of patients **AVOIDED EATING** over the past year due to oral health concerns

15,000

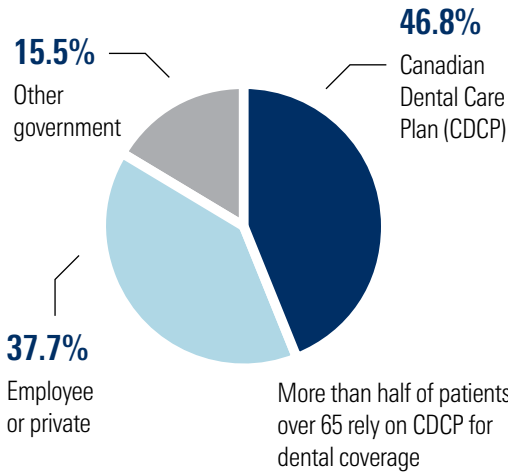
PATIENTS TREATED ANNUALLY

SERVE

THE FACULTY OF DENTISTRY MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF ITS PATIENTS. A 2025 PATIENT SURVEY REVEALS THE IMPACT OF CARE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PHILANTHROPY IN SUPPORTING OUR CLINICS

From research by assistant professor Sonica Singhal, dental public health resident Tina Mahjoubi and DDS students Faith Bendall and Jake Shea

AMONG THOSE WITH DENTAL COVERAGE



Patients are almost **3X LESS LIKELY TO HAVE PRIVATE DENTAL INSURANCE** than the general population

60,000

PATIENT VISITS ANNUALLY

MORE THAN 1/3 OF PATIENTS

had not seen a dentist in over a year before visiting the Faculty; it had been 3+ years for **15.4%** of patients

Among those who have not visited a dentist in 3+ years

NEARLY 40%

did not because of cost and **23.3%** because of lack of coverage

DEFY GRAVITY

The Faculty of Dentistry is making a powerful difference by enhancing the overall health of patients, translating new knowledge, tackling key clinical and policy challenges and preparing tomorrow's dental professionals.

The impact our alumni and friends have on the lives of our students and patients can be transformational. Learn more about our campaign at dentistry.utoronto.ca/giving

OVER 10% OF PATIENTS

have visited an emergency room for pain compared to **6.1%** of the general population

MORE THAN HALF OF FACULTY PATIENTS

have avoided going to the dentist because of cost

WELL OVER HALF OF PATIENTS HAVE NEEDED A DENTAL TREATMENT THEY COULD NOT AFFORD



DEFY GRAVITY

GIVING THANKS FOR A LONG CAREER

Donald Allen's Clinic 2 donation acknowledges a 50-plus-year career



Photo: Stef & Ethan

When Donald Allen (T9) graduated from the Faculty of Dentistry, he had no idea he'd still be working 57 years later at the age of 82 — and doing so entirely by choice.

“I worked hard and they gave me the tools to work hard with,” he says of his DDS instructors. “And, I’ve been lucky.”

Allen says the skills he developed during his four-year degree set him up for a great future. He spent nearly 50 years of his career in Windsor and now continues to help other dentists and do locum work, mostly in and around Stratford, where he and his wife have a condo and a farm.

Thanks to his work as a dentist, and also because of his successful investments in real estate and beyond, he's been

able to make a gift of \$100,000 to the Faculty. It's going to the building fund and will assist in the imminent renovation of Clinic 2, the main undergraduate teaching clinic. When the clinic is done, he'll have a named operator there.

Allen and his wife, Nancy — who had a good career as a math teacher, plus helped manage his clinics and the farms they've owned over the years — have also created a giving foundation, and the Faculty will receive another donation in future as part of their estate.

Allen came to U of T after studying all around the globe, as his father was a diplomat. He completed a BSc at Trinity College before joining the Faculty. There, he found a warm welcome.

“We had a fantastic class. The people were really nice and we had a great time.” In first year, he played on the U of T rugby team. “But after second year, I decided that my hands were fairly important,” he says of giving up the rough sport.

After graduation and a year-long internship in radiology at Toronto General, he took a job in Windsor to help out a dentist who was injured, and then stayed on. “My wife and I liked it down here. And there were only about 65 dentists in the whole city at the time.”

Allen went on to own clinics in Windsor, plus he ran one out of his home for a time. Starting in 2013, he began working a bit less, selling one of his clinics to start. He currently limits himself to working one day a week in Stratford and recently took on a short-term role in nearby Grand Bend.

He and Nancy have now shifted their lives to enjoy all they have. They’re moving from Windsor and spending more time in Stratford. They see as much theatre as possible, spend time with their two adult sons and their grandchildren, and do a little travelling as well.

Allen has no plans to entirely give up dentistry. On a technical level, he admits he’s done just about everything in the scope of a general dentist, which always keeps it interesting. “I still enjoy it. It keeps my brain going because, basically, dentistry is solving problems.”

But it’s actually the people side that really drives him to keep putting on his scrubs when he could be enjoying a full retirement. “I like the people, I like the staff, I like dealing with the patients.”

As he and Nancy plan ahead, they hope to keep enjoying their lives and also leave a legacy. “I’d rather give to a charity than to income tax,” admits Allen, so they’ve been careful in their estate planning so the organizations that mean a lot to them — including the Faculty — will benefit.

Allen hopes his fellow 1969 classmates, many of whom have done very well in dentistry and investing, just like him, will consider taking philanthropy more seriously. “I’m hopeful this gift will encourage them. They have done well. And they can’t take it with them.”

“I still enjoy it. It keeps my brain going because, basically, dentistry is solving problems”

The University of Toronto Faculty of Dentistry's
Great Alumni Event

SAVE THE DATE

May 8, 2026
Pilsner Hall at Steam Whistle Brewing
uoft.me/greatalumni





Photo: Stef & Ethan

THE FABRIC OF A LIFE AND CAREER

George Vasiga donated to Clinic 2 renovations, plus gave two gorgeous quilts

George Vasiga 7To, 7T2 Dip Ortho still considers it a wonder he found dentistry, and that his career helped support a life rich with family and creativity.

His parents both came from Slovakia in the 1930s, cobbling together the \$50 fee to get into Canada, with his mother gaining entry as a domestic and father claiming he'd work as a farm hand. However, on the way to a farm in Saskatchewan, he pretended he was not an immigrant by ditching his suitcase and covertly getting off the train in Ontario.

"My parents had a total of three weeks of education in Slovakia. So, you can appreciate the background that I came from. My parents always said, 'Go to school. Go to school. Go to school!'"

Luckily, George did well academically plus was good with his hands — at age 17 he and his brother took a vacant lot in Cambridge and built the family a house there. While doing his general science degree at U of T, he stopped by the Faculty to pick up a course calendar. "It looked daunting," he recalls, with words like "radiology" presenting a new world of possibilities.

He applied and got in and excelled in his studies. He married Nancy Williamson in 1967 and her hard work in administration got them both through the next few years.

George opened an orthodontics practice in Kitchener, which he later relocated to Waterloo. Nancy paused her career to care for their three children, and then later helped with the administrative side of the practice.

Their hobbies were sources of joy for them both. George loved building and woodworking and built much of their custom home that sits on one acre in Waterloo. As well, he transformed a rural farmhouse that began as pretty much an empty shell. Trim, fireplaces, you name it, he got his hands dirty working on it. "That was my hobby. Well, maybe the orthodontics was my hobby and that was my job," he jokes.

Meanwhile, Nancy was adept at choosing colours and decorating. But mostly she devoted herself to quilting, taking it up from her grandmother and picking up the basics from a course.

"You could see the progression," says George of Nancy's work, with her hand-applique technique becoming more refined over the years. "Her later quilts are just exquisite," he says,

noting she created about 100 quilts in her lifetime. She worked at her craft for as long as eight hours a day — again with the hobby becoming the job — at a drafting table he set up for her in the family room.

She was also positive and kind, and her death from cancer in 2024 at the age of 78 was devastating for George and the family.

The couple created the Dr. George Vasiga Scholarship in 2011; it supports a graduate student in Dental Public Health. And, now, George has given \$100,000 to Clinic 2 as it undergoes its imminent renovation. Here, he and Nancy will have a named operatory in recognition of this gift.

As well, he has donated two stunning quilts that Nancy made. One will be auctioned off at a Faculty event, and the other is currently on display at 124 Edward St.

“I was very grateful that I was able to carry on in school and found this wonderful opportunity by chance, because I didn't know what I was going to do

These days, George spends time with his grandchildren, travels and works on such projects as making charcuterie boards out of fine wood with sparkly handles — Nancy always loved sparkle.

He's also doing what he can to help the next generation. "The cost of dentistry and running a dental school is so expensive. And dentistry keeps modernizing." Hence his gift to help the main clinic at the Faculty stay up to date.

"I was very grateful that I was able to carry on in school and found this wonderful opportunity by chance, because I didn't know what I was going to do," he says.

Dentistry gave George so much, and he hopes other young people with the skillset but not the background will be able to do as he has — find a passion in both work and life. ■

Dental education and care happen here

Please support the future of clinical training and patient care. Name an operator today!

Pledging opportunities available

Contact alumni@dentistry.utoronto.ca for more information on the renovations of Clinic 2



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF DENTISTRY

DEFY
GRAVITY

WE REMEMBER...

RICHARD RAYMAN 7T0

Beloved faculty member Rick Rayman died in December. He joined the Faculty in 1987 as a clinical instructor and went on to serve as director of the Comprehensive Care Program. In 2014, he became the first ever director of student life at the Faculty, a position he held until 2023. Rayman was also a sought-after expert in dental malpractice. A dedicated long-distance runner, he ran every day for more than 40 years and took part in more than 400 marathons. He also encouraged students to run, and they



took part in Rayman's Run every fall, running a portion of the Toronto Waterfront Marathon while raising money for health care. Rayman was also a generous donor to the Faculty.

GEORGE SOUTER 6T7

Alumnus and former U of T Dentistry clinical instructor George Souter died last September at the age of 83. He was born in North Bay and graduated from the Faculty in 1967, joining the Phi Kappa Phi fraternity during his studies. Souter practised in Barrie for 46 years. For the last two decades of his career, he served



as a clinical instructor, and was elected into the honorary dental fraternity Omicron Kappa Upsilon. Souter served on the boards of the Canadian Mental Health Association and the United Way, was a warden of St. Paul's Anglican Church and a volunteer at the Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre.

CHRISTENA CHRUSZEZ 6T1

Christena Chruszez died last fall. She was one of just a handful of female DDS students in the Class of 1961, and had a long career as a dentist in Toronto. Her volunteer work included serving as an Alumni Board member for the Faculty, and chairing the Alumni Mentorship Program; she earned an Arbor Award in 2005 for her dedication. She was director of the Bloor Yorkville BIA and volunteered her time at a charity-run dental clinic.



MARTIN BUCKSPAN 6T3

Martin Buckspan, a dentist-turned-physician, died in November at the age of 85. After completing his DDS at the Faculty, he studied medicine at U of T, graduating in



1967 and specializing in urology. He served as the head of urology at Mount Sinai Hospital and, as a pioneer in male fertility, founding one of Toronto's first fertility clinics.

PETER WILLIAMS 6T4

Peter Williams died last fall at the age of 85. He completed his DDS and followed that up with studies in materials science, also at U of T. In 1970, he began



teaching dental materials at the University of Manitoba. Williams was a member of the dental committee of the International Organization for Standardization and a reviewer

for the *Journal of the Canadian Dental Association*.

WALTER MONTANERA



Neuroradiologist Walter Montanera died last September at age 71. He was an associate professor of medical imaging at U of T, working at Toronto Western Hospital and St. Michael's Hospital in a career spanning 40 years. He and his wife, Mary Lou, set up a bursary at the Faculty of Dentistry in honour of their daughter Lisa, who died in 2012 during her DDS. The family has given generously across U of T and University Health Network in her name.

WE MOURN THE LOSS

- Paul Aquilina 6T3
- Barbara (Graham) Carter 5T6 Dip DN
- Stephen Fuzy 6T2
- Virginia (Snowdon) Graham 6T3 Dip DH
- Danford Royce MacKay 6T2
- William (Ron) McLeod 6T9
- Margaret (Andris) Miller 5T8 Dip DH
- Harvey Orfus 6T1
- Janice (Taylor) Sheppard 5T1 Dip DN
- Martin Slater 6T7, 7T0 Dip Ortho
- Barclay Stewart 5T6
- Norman Talsky 6T4
- Paul Thomas 6T2
- Ivan Wambara 6T5, 7T3 Dip Ortho
- Kenneth Watson 6T3

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uoft.me/deansfund



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