



“
**WORDS OF
WISDOM**
”

**Dean's Faculty Members Offer Expertise,
Mentorship, and Know-How to UMSOD Students**

STORY BY GWEN FARISS NEWMAN
AND PHOTOS BY TRACEY BROWN



DR. R. CHESKIS
Deans Faculty

A

T THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY (UMSOD), A GROUP OF EXPERIENCED ORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS VOLUNTEERS IN THE SCHOOL'S CLINICS, ASSISTING, ADVISING, OVERSEEING, AND MENTORING DENTAL STUDENTS. KNOWN AS THE DEAN'S FACULTY PROGRAM, THE 14-YEAR-OLD INITIATIVE HAS GROWN FROM ABOUT 40 VOLUNTEERS A YEAR TO MORE THAN 200.

Members of this vital program include community practitioners and recently retired professionals. Some are alumni, others are not. Some travel a few miles to serve in the clinics, others commute from as far away as New Jersey or Virginia. Last year, they donated more than 20,000 hours to the school.

Their most valuable gifts, however, may come in the form of wisdom, empathy, and practical know-how gained through years of patient care.

Spotlighted here are three Dean's Faculty members who share their experiences.

CONNECTING MATTERS

Chris Liang, DDS '98, has vivid childhood memories of watching his father practice dentistry. He loved the way his father worked with his hands, but he was captivated by the interaction between dentist and patient. Later, as a student at UMSOD, Liang enjoyed the connections he formed with peers, professors, and patients. Together, he says, those early experiences shaped his views about the value of one-on-one relationships. It's little wonder that less than a decade after graduating from UMSOD, Liang was back on campus — as a Dean's Faculty volunteer.

"I like interacting with younger dentists who want to learn," says Liang, who runs a practice alongside his father with offices in Potomac, Md., College Park, Md., and Washington, D.C. A member of the Dean's Faculty since 2006, Liang commutes an hour each way every other Thursday to interact with students. Whether demonstrating the latest technologies and procedures or discussing a treatment plan drawn up by a student, Liang is energized by sharing what he knows with other aspiring dentists — just as his father did.

Liang — a member of the American Dental Association's House of Delegates; UMSOD's Board of Visitors; and the Maryland State Dental Association Charitable and Education Foundation's executive board as well as a past member of UMSOD's Alumni Association Board of Directors — brings a wealth of knowledge about dentistry to the program.

That broad experience with professional dentistry associations is of great value to an aspiring practitioner, says Chris Scott, DDS '15, who studied with Liang. Now UMSOD's chief orthodontic resident, Scott considers the Dean's Faculty a real asset to the school. "Whenever prospective residents come to the school, I always spotlight the Dean's Faculty Program," Scott says.



Chris Liang ▲

“

These volunteers come to our clinic with a wide range of treatment modalities and experience,”

Scott adds. “That insight empowers us to go into any setting and hit the ground running.

”

Liang, who in his spare time likes skiing, playing tennis, and fishing, says volunteering as a Dean’s Faculty member has been a two-way street. Not only has he enjoyed sharing his knowledge, but he’s picked up a few things, too.

“About 10 years ago, I learned about social media from residents in the clinic. Now it’s part of my daily routine,” says Liang, who uses Facebook to connect with peers and follow discussions within the field. “At first I dismissed it as just a passing fancy, but now I see its value.”

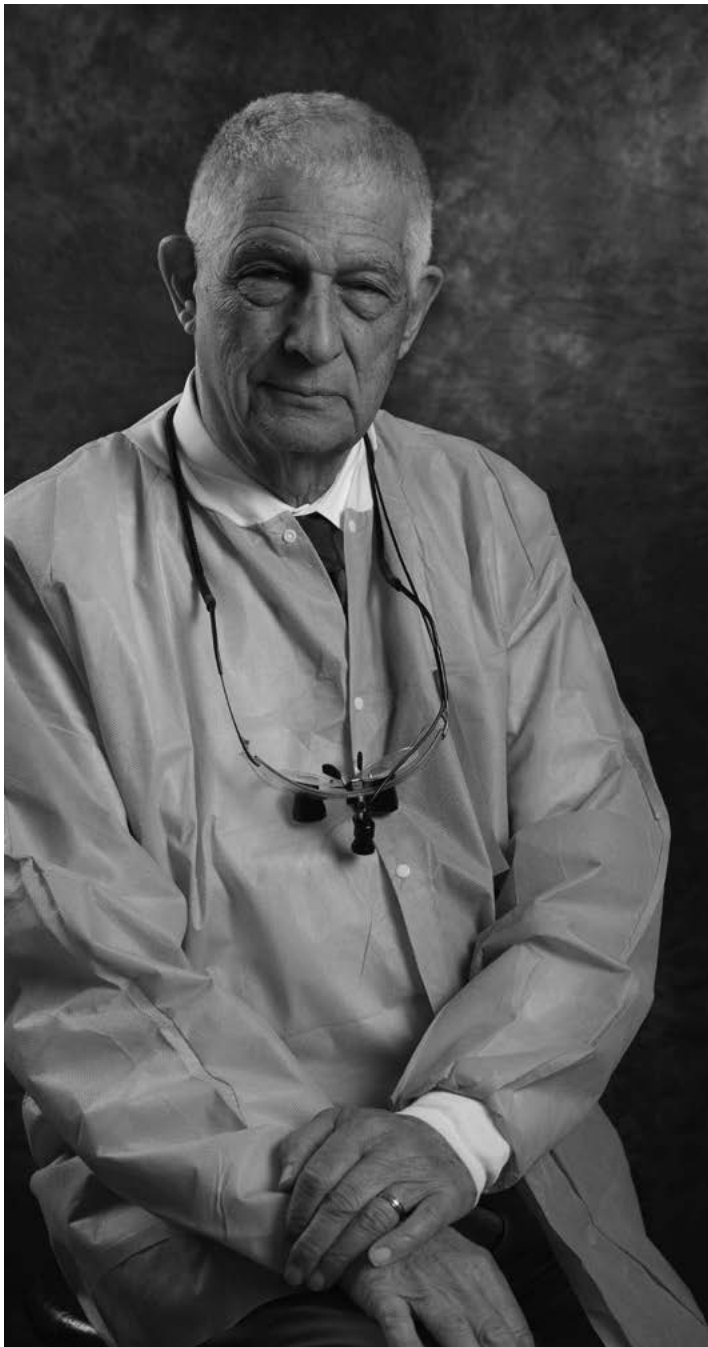
THE ‘AHA MOMENT’

Since 2013, retired dentist **Richard Cheskis, DDS**, has volunteered 2½ days a week as a Dean’s Faculty member. Witnessing the moment when a student “gets it” keeps him coming back to UMSOD.

“The students learn very quickly,” he says. “The hand skills take longer to perfect, but if you stick with them long enough, you get to see that ‘aha moment’ when they master a skill, and from that point on, they’re not afraid.”

A 1959 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Dentistry, Cheskis practiced dentistry in Severna Park, Md., before retiring in February 2013. Two months later, he was volunteering at UMSOD.

“I’d always wanted to teach,” he explains. “And I love it. I really enjoy interacting with students. In the morning, I’m with first-year students. In the afternoon, I work with third- and fourth-year students. And I’m not sure which is more enjoyable. I get to see them when they first arrive, then later in the program, and I love seeing how they mature and how fast they pick things up.”



▲
**Richard
Cheskis**

For Cheskis — a golfer, past president of the Greater Severna Park Athletic Association, and former director of a soccer program — the camaraderie with students and faculty is greatly rewarding.

“When you’re in private practice, you’re not really working with other dentists,” he says. “Here, we go out to lunch and engage in a lot of conversations. You also get to see new technology coming out and can be a part of that change in dentistry as it occurs.”

Cheskis relishes sharing what he’s learned in a lifetime of practice with young professionals, whether how to effectively place a crown or run the business side of a practice.



You get up, you come here, and you enjoy it. You’re not stressed out or on a time clock,” Cheskis says. “The more you’re here, the better it is. You forge a closer relationship with the students.



Margo Rubin, DDS ’18, values the one-on-one interactions. “In school, we’re kind of learning by the book. But [Dean’s Faculty members] spend the majority of their time in private practice and draw from the most recent and relevant experiences clinically. I feel we grow the most from that exposure and their instant feedback.”

Cheskis’ willingness to share new ways of looking at or addressing situations is invaluable, Rubin says. “Dr. Cheskis is very encouraging. He wants you to learn things on your own, but he’s a safety net if you need one. I remember in pre-clinic, he’d offer a couple of ways to do a restoration. And that’s the only way to learn: Looking at your options and putting them into practice.”

LEADING THE WAY

As a pre-med student at Temple University in Philadelphia, **Nahid Shahry, DDS**, entered a dentist’s office in need of treatment and, in addition to getting great care, found a mentor. Looking back, the experience fueled her passion for dentistry, provided a female professional role model, and inspired her to become a mentor herself.

Intrigued by what she saw in the dentist’s office, Shahry asked if she could help. The dentist “pointed out that I had no degree and no experience,” says Shahry, who later graduated from New York University College of Dentistry. Shahry was disappointed and insisted that

she could learn. “She initially let me come in part-time. And, in a couple of months, she saw how interested I was and hired me as a dental assistant.”

That early experience channeled Shahry’s interest more specifically into oral health. It also taught her the incredible power of mentorship.

A UMSOD volunteer in the Advanced Education in General Dentistry (AEGD) program since 1996 and a member of the Dean’s Faculty since 2006, Shahry practices at Churchville Family Dentistry in Bel Air, Md., and has been recognized by UMSOD for her outstanding service. As a Dean’s Faculty volunteer, she spends every Wednesday afternoon working one-on-one with students as they learn their craft. “The Dean’s Faculty Program allows me to be the teacher I’ve always dreamed of being,” Shahry says.

The mother of a third-year student at UMSOD, Shahry relishes mentoring a wide range of students. But an unexpected perk of the volunteer position has been having access to a steady flow of highly trained young professionals. “I’ve probably hired about 15 students directly from the school,” Shahry says. “Many of them have stayed with me a long time.”

Ashima Ahuya, a visiting scholar from India in the AEGD program who graduated in May, likens Shahry’s mentoring style to that of an enthusiastic cheerleader for and watchful supporter of the students and the patients they treat.

“

I really like her teaching style,”
Ahuya says. “She creates a
very comfortable environment.
Whenever I’m working with
a patient, she treats me like
a colleague.

”

Ahuya also views Shahry as a role model. “She’s been in private practice for so many years, and she’s very motivated and positive about dentistry. She’s dedicated to patient care, open to research, and very willing to try new things herself,” Ahuya says. “She’s also a woman in a leadership position, and that’s very inspirational to me.”

Nahid Shahry ▼

