Where Are They Now?

Past Recipients of the Samuel D. Harris Research and Policy Fellowship

Part 2

In honor of the 10th anniversary of the Harris Fellowship, the July and September issues of *PDT* review what the past recipients are doing now and how the Fellowship experience has affected their life choices, perspectives of the profession, and efforts to improve the oral health of children. Sponsored by the AAPD and Preventech, the Fellowship Award provides an opportunity for pediatric dental residents to participate in research and advocacy activities of the Academy.

2010-2011

Dr. Mary Catherine Correll Wurth

*Campbellsville, Ky.*

“We have a seat in our operatories every day, but it is just as important to have a seat at our local, state and national governing bodies if we want to protect and grow our profession,” says Dr. Correll Wurth. “One person can impact change, and many people working toward the same goal create even greater change,” is the most valuable lesson she learned during her Fellowship. Participating in Lobby Day, observing the AAPD board of trustees, and completing training she rates as incredible experiences. She recalls other benefits of her Fellowship. “Making acquaintances with new graduating dentists who will become pillars of their communities is one of my most treasured memories. I am better for having had the opportunity.”

Her Harris project identified reasons why pregnant women are not getting needed oral health care. The research revealed increasing oral health literacy is not enough. The women in the study were provided education on the impact of oral health during pregnancy, yet many did not seek identified necessary care. Results of the study were presented at the 2011 AAPD Annual Session.
Wurth’s present leadership roles for pediatric dentistry include meeting with state congress representatives to discuss children’s oral health legislation, coordinating dental screening events for Head Start, and speaking to general dentists and parent groups to help solve access issues in Kentucky.

Wurth graduated in 2008 from the University of Kentucky College of Dentistry. Following a general practice residency at the Long Island Jewish Medical Center in 2009, she received her Certificate of Pediatric Dentistry in 2011 from Schneider/Cohen Children’s Hospital in New Hyde Park, New York. She is in private practice in Campbellville and is busy as the mother of four young boys. As her home life changes, she plans a more active role in organized dentistry. “Because the Academy has given me so much, it is my hope to return the favor.”

2011-2012
Dr. Jacqueline Hom Burgette
Chapel Hill, N.C.

According to Dr. Jacqueline Hom Burgette, “This is a critical time for pediatric dentistry to engage in changing health policies. From insurance carriers and treatment codes to the regulations under which we provide care—we need to be a part of these choices to ensure the best care for the children in this country.”

The worth of speaking out was made clear for Burgette through her participation in AAPD Lobby Days, where she successfully met with Congress representatives. She worked to expand pediatric resident involvement in congressional meetings, and Lobby Days are now part of the leadership curriculum for the University of North Carolina pediatric dental residency program.

Burgette’s research, titled “State Medicaid Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis Treatment (EPSDT) Guidelines: Adherence to Professionally Recommended Best Oral Health Practices” is the first report to provide an assessment of each state’s compliance with recommended best practices for infants and toddlers as defined by state EPSDT schedules. Her report was published in JADA, March 2013.

Burgette graduated from the Harvard School of Dental Medicine in Boston in 2010. She is a joint pediatric dentistry resident at UNC School of Dentistry and a Ph.D. candidate in Health Policy and Management at UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. Her dissertation investigates the role of Early Head Start on dental use and quality of life.

2012-2013
Dr. Barrett W. R. Peters
Charlottesville, Va.

“Whether it is research, lobbying or right in your own practice, stay involved in advocacy. There is a place for everyone,” reports Dr. Barrett Peters about lessons learned from the Harris Fellowship. He considers AAPD Lobby Days as the best part of the experience. “I saw how people working with a common goal can achieve great things. It was an honor to be working on behalf of a profession I love.”

His research project, “The Impact of Medicaid Reform on Dental Practice Setting,” assessed the effects of dental Medicaid reform in Virginia on such dental practice settings as private practice, corporate practice and safety-net clinics. Results supported that Medicaid reform correlated with a significant increase in the number of dental claims, providers and practice settings in Virginia. The project was presented as a poster at the 2013 AAPD Annual Session.

Peters has served as a member of the House of Delegates and the Committee on the New Dentist of the Virginia Dental Association, as well as the Student Body President of the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) School of Dentistry. In spite of these leadership roles, he believes his most important contribution is through his practice. “I advocate daily for the well-being of my patients by providing guidance to establish a lifetime of oral health.”

Peters graduated in 2011 from the VCU School of Dentistry in Richmond. In 2013, he completed his pediatric dental residency and Master of Science in Dentistry from VCU. He is the owner and solo practitioner of Piedmont Pediatric Dentistry in Charlottesville and Waynesboro.
Dr. Juan Fernando Yepes  
*Indianapolis, Ind.*

“The Fellowship gave me a better understanding of the importance of organized dentistry as the best pathway to maximize advocacy to children," states Dr. Juan Yepes. He also appreciated the mentorship he received during his Harris research project. “I was coached by terrific investigators. Thanks to the Fellowship experience, I learned the impact of policy analysis in the day-by-day practice of pediatric dentistry.”

For his Harris Project, Yepes researched the relationship between early preventive appointments and the subsequent use of Medicaid dental services in Kentucky. The research showed that early preventive visits have a positive impact in future dental treatments. The project is in the final steps before submission for publication.

Yepes serves on the editorial board of *Pediatric Dentistry*. He is a member of the editorial board of *Oral Surgery, Oral Medicine, Oral Pathology, Oral Radiology*. In addition, he shares his many years of experience in medicine, diagnosis and radiology through clinical lectures, receiving outstanding responses from both dental and medical audiences.

Yepes attended the University of Iowa and the University of Pennsylvania where he completed a fellowship and residency in Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology and Oral Medicine in 2002 and 2004. He graduated with a master's degree in the public health program in 2006 from the University of Kentucky College of Public Health. In 2008, Yepes completed a residency program in dental public health at University of Texas, Baylor College of Dentistry and in 2011 he completed a doctorate of Public Health with an emphasis in epidemiology at the University of Kentucky College of Public Health. In the summer of 2012, Yepes finished his Certificate and Master of Science in Pediatric Dentistry at the University of Kentucky. Yepes is associate professor of Pediatric Dentistry at the James Whitcomb Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis.

Dr. Catherine Ashley Orynych  
*Dallas, Texas*

“Understanding the depth of our professional society and experiencing how passionately our members are serving children inspired me to continue on a path of health policy, women and children advocacy, and patient care,” says Dr. Orynych. “The people I’ve met epitomize my belief that we are indeed blessed to be in the most incredible of professions.”

Orynych’s research project focused on an evaluation of the legislative differences in defining the Affordable Care Act’s pediatric dental benefits on state and federal levels, as well as the role of pediatric advocates across state health insurance exchanges. Her research found that policy change by the pediatric dental profession requires advocating for the following: 1) mandatory purchase of dental coverage through state exchanges; 2) tax subsidy contribution toward pediatric dental benefits; and 3) consistent regulatory insurance. Orynych published her results in three articles in the January/February 2015 issue of *Pediatric Dentistry*.

Orynych received a Doctor of Dental Medicine degree from the Harvard School of Dental Medicine and a Master in Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government in 2011. She completed her Certificate in Pediatric Dentistry and Master in Oral Science from the Texas A&M University Baylor College of Dentistry in 2014. Orynych currently travels between Oklahoma and Texas, treating families and honing her clinical skills at On the Cusp Pediatric Dentistry in Tulsa, while remaining involved with student research at Baylor in Dallas.

**Conclusion**

Although the Harris Fellows mention a variety of experiences as being the most memorable, they agree that the benefits of AAPD membership far outweigh the cost. As Yepes says, “Being an active member in organized pediatric dentistry is critical for the success of oral health public policy in children.” Dr. Courtney Alexander stresses the importance of AAPD involvement, especially early in one’s career. “New pediatric dentists need to get involved with the Academy and the Foundation. Current leaders value the new dentist perspective and are continually looking to engage new volunteers. If you are interested in a leadership opportunity, speak up! You are never too young or too ‘green’ to get involved.”