



## DDS STUDENT PROFILE

### *Alex Sy, '16*

#### *All in the Family*

AS AN UNDERGRADUATE at the University of California, Los Angeles, Alex Sy, DDS, '16, majored in bioengineering. He loved science and research, and knew that his path might eventually lead to dental school. Alex comes from a family of dentists and can remember looking on as his father, James, a Los Angeles-based orthodontist, showed projector slides on treatment options and oral hygiene to patients. Moreover, Alex's older brother, Frank, is a 2015 graduate of NYU College of Dentistry's Advanced Education Program in Periodontics.

After graduating from UCLA with a BS in bioengineering, and still undecided about pursuing a dental degree, Alex took a job as a research assistant at City of Hope's renowned cancer treatment and research center. While there, Alex worked in a lab investigating oncogenesis under the supervision of Dr. Yun Yen, a noted oncologist, and he coauthored a paper with Dr. Yen which was published in *Nature*. Although Alex enjoyed his work at City of Hope, he ultimately decided that practicing dentistry was the way to go.

In 2012, Alex enrolled at NYU College of Dentistry, where his brother, Frank, was already studying. The brothers had actually planned on attending NYU Dentistry at the same time. "It was my first time leaving the West Coast," says Alex, "and it was comforting to know that my brother and I would be able to share an apartment and experience the city together."

At NYU, Alex's passion and drive led him to contribute to the College and the broader community in many ways, including as a teaching assistant for first-year classes, a peer mentor in the Advanced Standing Program, a participant in the NYU Dentistry/Colgate-Palmolive Student Leadership Retreat, the Student Leadership Track Program, and the NYU College of Dentistry/Henry Schein Cares Global Student Outreach Program, where he provided dental care to children and adults in the rural, underserved community of La Preciosita, Mexico.

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Alex has further demonstrated his leadership abilities as an officer of the Chinese Student Dental Association, which organizes local outreaches as well as social events.

Alex also discovered that he has a passion for teaching. “I am not thinking about if I am ever going to teach, but rather when I will be able to start teaching,” he says.

Alex’s future plans also include private practice. But first, he will be pursuing postdoctoral studies in orthodontics at the Saint Louis University Center for Advanced Dental Education.

One of the things that Alex values most about his education at NYU is the strong clinical background it has given him. “I really cherish the excellent training I’ve had and have worked really hard to become a good general practitioner,” says Alex. “A general practice background is very comprehensive, which is why it is such an important foundation for specialty training.”

Dr. Steven Resnick, clinical assistant professor of cariology and comprehensive care, served as Alex’s group practice director. “I

worked with Alex in the clinic, and he is a phenomenal student,” says Dr. Resnick. “He is kind, passionate, pays attention to detail, and is totally patient-centered.”

“Dr. Resnick influenced me greatly,” says Alex. “Because I come from an engineering background, I like to know why things are done in a certain way. Dr. Resnick always explained the reason for doing things when formulating treatment plans and figuring out the best way to help patients.”

While at NYU, Alex also took advantage of the opportunity to build on his interest in applied research. He worked under Dr. Paulo Coelho, associate professor of biomaterials and Linkow Associate Professor of Implant Dentistry, in the biomaterials lab, where he helped develop a protocol for analyzing bone remodeling using micro-CT and Amira 3D software analysis with the goal of reducing sample data time from a typical three-month period to a three-week period.

“Working in Dr. Coelho’s lab was familiar and different at the

same time,” says Alex. “In the cancer research lab at City of Hope, I was working with cells; in the materials lab, I was working mainly with nonliving organisms. Dr. Coelho showed me another dimension to research.”

Dr. Silvia Spivakovsky, clinical associate professor of oral and maxillofacial pathology, radiology and medicine, who taught Alex in the third-year elective course “Honors in Clinical Pharmacology” and in the fourth-year “Senior Comprehensive Care” course, also had a great influence on him.

“Professor Spivakovsky emphasizes the importance of making clinical decisions based on scientific evidence,” says Alex. “She taught me how to closely read scientific literature and to identify the most important takeaway.”

Looking to the future, Alex plans to move back to Los Angeles and most likely join his father’s practice. His brother, Frank, is planning on doing the same. “My brother is a periodontist and I’ll be an orthodontist — a good combination,” he says. ■