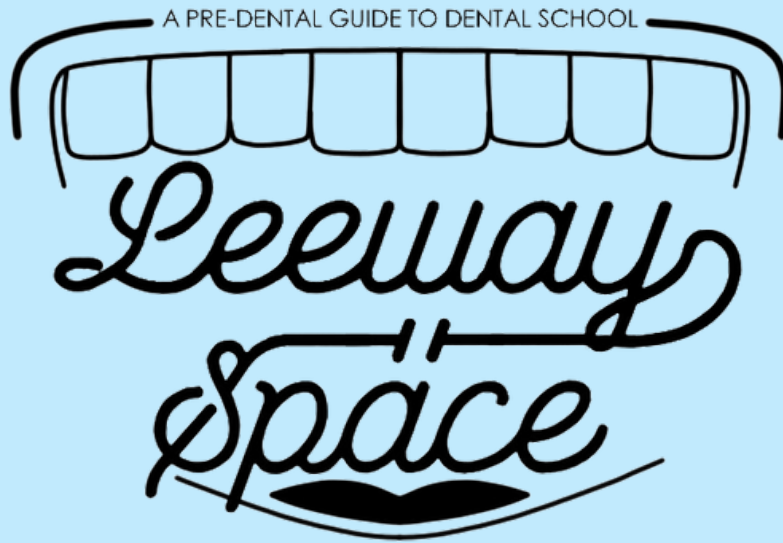


S P R I N G
2024



VOLUME 9  **ISSUE II**



Scan me to visit the
**UCLA ASDA
Website**



youtube.com/uclaasda



facebook.com/uclaasda



instagram.com/ucla_asda_predental

TABLE OF CONTENTS



NEWSLETTER TEAM



Message from Pre-Dental Outreach Chairs



Message from Editors-In-Chief



Message from Newsletter Committee



Meet the Newsletter Team

FEATURES



Oral Health and Mental Health in Adolescent Patients



Brushing Away Stress: The Intersection of Dentistry, Art, and Mental Health



Exploring the Hidden Implication Behind a Person's Smile



The Hidden Forces Shaping Orthodontics



Oral Health Disparities in Communities of Color



Changing One Smile at a Time

KEEP IN TOUCH



How to Keep in Contact with Us



**MESSAGE FROM
PRE-DENTAL
OUTREACH CHAIRS**

Hello, Pre-Dental Students!

UCLA ASDA Pre-Dental congratulates you all for your endeavors and decisions in pursuing dentistry! This is a career filled with so many opportunities and continued learning, and we are beyond thrilled to work with you so that you can fulfill your dreams!



**Caitlin Mispagel
UCLA D2**



**Brendan Co
UCLA D2**

We sincerely hope you enjoy the Spring 2024 issue of Leeway Space, a publication written by and geared towards pre-dental students like you! You'll be able to read about experiences of other pre-dents ranging from the intersection of physics and smiles to individuals' "Why Dentistry". We hope you can continue to lean upon the pre-dental resources and valuable information we provide during the year to guide you on your way to dental school! As always feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions or concerns, we are here to help!

Sincerely,

Caitlin Mispagel and Brendan Co

Caitlin Mispagel and Brendan Co

ASDA Pre-Dental Outreach Committee Co-Chairs 2023-2024



**MESSAGE FROM
NEWSLETTER
COMMITTEE**

Hi everyone!

As the chairs of UCLA ASDA Communications and Newsletter Committee for 2023-2024, we are beyond lucky to have the privilege to work alongside the dedicated ASDA pre-dental committee on “Leeway Space.” As a pre-dental, I, Jessica, had the pleasure of assisting the magazine process as editor-in-chief from 2020-2021, and I am so thrilled to assist with the creation of another edition of “Leeway Space” from the publication side. Both of us are ecstatic to read the newest publication of “Leeway Space” and thoroughly enjoy watching the evolution of the magazine year-by-year.



**Jessica Mele
UCLA D2**

Leeway Space offers a unique and engaging opportunity for pre-dental students to share their experiences and connect with other pre-dentals from universities nation-wide, and even worldwide. We are so proud of the Leeway Space team for their dedicated contributions to the newsletter and their promotion of excellence, involvement, and creativity. We invite our readers to obtain inspiration from the Leeway team’s diverse experiences, and we hope this edition of Leeway Space offers plenty of advice, whether you’re considering dentistry as a career or simply have an interest in the dental field. Enjoy!

Best,

Jessica Mele and Julia Noguchi

**Jessica Mele and Julia Noguchi
Class of 2026**



**Julia Noguchi
UCLA D2**



MESSAGE FROM EDITORS IN CHIEF

Dear readers,

Welcome to the spring 2024 publication! We are excited to share with you Volume 9: Issue 2 of Leeway Space. Dentistry is often viewed as a field solely focused on oral health and hygiene. However, this unique edition aims to explore something different - the fascinating connections between dentistry and various other aspects, such as mental health, art, and even physics. By highlighting these connections, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the multifaceted role of dentistry in our lives and its far-reaching influence. This edition of articles aims to broaden our understanding of dentistry, challenging traditional perceptions and encouraging readers to appreciate the multidisciplinary nature of this profession,



Jessy Ji
UCLA '24

We are deeply grateful for the incredible opportunity to lead the exceptional team of writers, editors, and graphic designers behind this publication. It is our sincere hope that the narratives and subjects explored within these pages will provide valuable insights to all of you embarking on your pre-dental journeys. We wholeheartedly thank you for supporting Leeway Space by reading this edition, and we wish you all the very best as you pursue your aspirations.

Kind regards,

Jessy Ji and Sunali Patel

Jessy Ji and Sunali Patel
Leeway Space Editors-In-Chief



Sunali Patel
UOP '24

MEET THE NEWSLETTER TEAM



Amanda Zavala
Pomona
College '26



Galia Odabashian
Pepperdine
University '26



Janan Bustami
UCLA '24



Julia Son
UCLA '25



Lexus Nguyen
CSUF '23



Misheel Unur
UCLA '25



Nicole Oliva
UCLA '25



Riddhi Patel
UOP '25



Sofia Lin
UC Davis '21



**Suriyen
Subramaniam**
UCLA '25



**Sydney
(Seohyun) Min**
UCLA '25



Terrence Chi
UCLA '25



Utsavi Kapadia
Hofstra
University '18

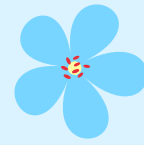
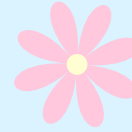


Yena Jang
Pomona
College '24

Oral Health and Mental Health in Adolescent Patients



Amanda Zavala
Pomona College '26



About 36% of the United States struggles with dental anxiety (Cleveland Clinic, n.d.), yet discussion on this topic remains limited. It is easy to feel confused and under-valued in the dental office, underscoring the importance of recognizing the connections between oral and mental health in order to provide care that encompasses overall wellness.

A key aspect to oral-mental health connection is its bidirectional nature. Poor oral hygiene and dissatisfaction with the appearance of your smile can have detrimental effects on a person's well-being, such as chronic pain and discomfort. Individuals suffering with chronic pain are at increased risks for psychological problems, with around 35-45% of them experiencing depression (American Psychiatric Association, 2020). Dissatisfaction with teeth appearance can diminish quality of life, especially for adolescents who closely tie self-confidence to their appearance. The mouth's pivotal role in body image significantly shapes adolescents' self-perception. Under constant societal pressures to have a "perfect" smile, many struggle with low self-esteem regarding their teeth, hindering their ability to engage in daily tasks, including social interactions.

The profound impact of mental health on oral hygiene cannot be overstated. Individuals with conditions like depression or PTSD may struggle to maintain dental care routines, leading to decay and tooth loss (Tiwari et al., 2021). These conditions are exacerbated by irregular toothbrushing, a task that may feel easy for many, but impossible for those already struggling to perform basic daily tasks.

Why does it matter?

Limited research on the oral and mental health of adolescents poses risks to pediatric dentistry practices and may impede the generalizability of findings. Dental anxiety can develop from extensive treatment, pain experiences, or feeling judged at dental offices. Onset during youth can adversely affect oral health as one ages. However, the lack of research specific to adolescents makes it difficult to ascertain the exact impacts.

Although research is lacking, I can attest to the adverse effects of developing dental anxiety at a young age from personal experience. Undergoing intense treatment throughout my adolescent years had a lasting psychological impact. During treatment, my self-confidence suffered, and I felt even less assured after each appointment. Enduring constant pain from multiple surgeries and braces brought feelings of hopelessness and restricted my daily activities. I dreaded dental appointments knowing they would entail 2-3 hours of both psychological and physical pain. Even now, in my adult years post-treatment, dental anxiety persists in different forms. I stress over forgetting my retainer, endure recurring nightmares about dental accidents, and hyperfixate on the appearance of my teeth.



I share these details not seeking empathy or pity, but to stress the importance of prioritizing the well-being of adolescent patients. Adolescents, in a pivotal stage of development, may internalize their issues more than adults, preventing their ability to speak up for themselves or feel in control in certain environments. Like research shows, insecurities stemming from dental aesthetics impedes social interactions, causing social isolation out of the fear of being judged (American Psychiatric Association, 2020). Since patients feel they lack control, feelings of loneliness and self-doubt can appear. Experiencing these emotions for long periods of time can lead to depression and deepened fear for dentistry which can eventually escalate into avoiding dental treatment. This can feed into the vicious, two-fold cycle of oral health bidirectionally undermining mental health.

What are some potential routes to address these intersections?

To begin addressing this issue, I would urge dental professionals to allocate time to discuss each patient's feelings before beginning their appointment. It is important to give patients the space to voice any concerns, fears, and hesitations in all appointments. Creating an environment that fosters collaboration and inclusion, while balancing power dynamics between patients and providers, is crucial for individuals of all ages, particularly adolescents. Many patients' dental anxiety stems from "previous negative or traumatic experiences... self-consciousness, lack of understanding... perception of body image, and the vulnerable position of lying back in a dental chair" (Appukuttan, 2016), emphasizing the need for individualized patient care and understanding. Other solutions may involve encouraging the use of anxiety medication, exposure therapy, or cognitive behavior therapy. However, I believe that the greater incorporation of enhanced communication, reassurance, compassion, and patience between in provider-patient interactions would be a significant first step in alleviating the anxiety experienced by most patients.



How dental health and mental health are connected. (2020). <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/how-dental-health-and-mental-health-are-connected#:~:text=Many%20people%2C%20including%20people%20with,mental%20health%20conditions%20more%20difficult.>
Professional, C. C. M. (n.d.). Dentophobia (Fear of dentists). Cleveland Clinic. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22594-dentophobia-fear-of-dentists>
Strategies to Manage Patients With Dental Anxiety and Dental Phobia: Literature review. (2016). National Institute of Health, 8, 35-50. <https://doi.org/10.2147/CCIDE.S63626>
Tiwari, T., Kelly, A., Randall, C., Tranby, E., & Franstve-Hawley, J. (2022). Association between mental health and oral health status and care utilization. National Institute of Health, 2(732882). <https://doi.org/10.3389/froh.2021.732882>

Exploring the Hidden Implications Behind a Person's Smile



Lexus Nguyen
CSUF '23

We've all heard the saying "Don't judge a book by its cover," which is easier said than done, especially when most do it subconsciously in social settings. Whether we like it or not, a person's initial impression of someone is heavily influenced by appearance, a reason why most professionals advise us to "dress to impress" for job interviews. Factors such as hairstyles, clothing, and postures provide context clues to others about our identity, yet they can be easily changed to suit one's personal taste. However, some aspects of our appearance are out of our control, such as acne, weight, and especially how our teeth look when we talk or smile. Smiling is especially important as it's a form of body language that signals happiness and confidence. Nevertheless, people are still judged and considered at fault for not fixing their "imperfections" right away. The shame that comes with this judgment causes people to come up with quick and sometimes harmful solutions instead of seeking help from health professionals.

While the appearance of teeth unsurprisingly contributes to how others treat us and how we perceive ourselves, its effect on mental health is stronger than expected. Besides being an indicator for overall health, a survey found that those who had whiter teeth were thought to possess higher social competence and intellectual ability (Kershaw et al., 2008). Other studies have shown that those who don't possess ideal teeth often face prejudice starting as early as childhood (Khalid & Quinonez, 2015). These harsh judgments early on can lead to lower self-esteem resulting in serious consequences such as withdrawing from social interactions and struggling to form new relationships. Additionally, these insecurities can worsen body image and lead to habits such as covering smiles with hands or hesitating to speak out of fear of showing one's teeth too much.

But where do expectations and self-consciousness about teeth come from? Society's expectations of teeth are heavily influenced by celebrities, models, advertisements, and social media promoting blinding white, straight teeth also known as the "Hollywood smile". These high expectations lead to widespread misunderstandings of what teeth should actually look like. It's important to remember that there are several reasons why someone's smile might not fit these ideals besides hygienic reasons, such as genetics, taking certain medications or antibiotics, and health conditions. The heightened standards surrounding teeth can take a mental toll, as individuals may feel pressured to present a perfect smile while forgetting that healthy teeth are much more important than aesthetics.

These insecurities often drive people to desire changes in their smiles but there are high barriers to getting professional and safe help. Cosmetic dentistry such as teeth whitening, braces, Invisalign, implants, and veneers are not typically covered by medical insurance and can cost up to thousands of dollars out of pocket. For that reason, it isn't surprising to see people turn to medical tourism or home remedies to save money. Although tempting, the CDC warns against dental procedures in foreign countries stating that "...practitioners abroad might not adhere to standard infection-control practices used in the United States..."



This puts individuals at risk for infection from blood borne or waterborne pathogens. Home remedies popular on social media suggest natural and seemingly "safer" methods to improve the appearance of teeth such as using activated charcoal, baking soda and hydrogen peroxide, and oil pulling. With these videos and posts attracting thousands to millions of views, several dentists caution against these methods due to lack of research showing their efficacy and safety.

With that being said, there is nothing wrong about wanting to enhance aspects of our appearance for a boost in self-confidence. When it comes to teeth, however, it's best practice to consult dentists for guidance on the most effective ways to improve smiles and explore options that are more affordable. High beauty standards surrounding teeth often mislead many into believing in a false image of what teeth should look like. Maintaining the natural state of one's teeth should be prioritized unless a dentist suggests changes.

Crist, M., Appiah, G., Leidel, L., & Stoney, R. (2023, May). Medical Tourism. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2024/health-care-abroad/medical-tourism>
Kershaw, S., Newton, J. T., & Williams, D. M. (2008). The influence of tooth colour on the perceptions of personal characteristics among female dental patients: Comparisons of unmodified, decayed and "whitened" teeth. *British Dental Journal*, 204(5), <https://doi.org/10.1038/bdj.2008.134>
Khalid, A., & Quinonez, C. (2015). Straight, white teeth as a social prerogative. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 37(5), 782-796. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12238>

Oral Health Disparities in Communities of Color



Misheel Unur
UCLA '25



In communities of color, access to oral health care and education is often a luxury rather than a basic right. Racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to receive poor quality health care even when factors such as insurance status, income, age, and condition severity are comparable (Minorities, 2002). This can extend to oral health and ultimately lead to poor health outcomes. Regular preventive dental care is vital for good oral health because it allows for early detection and treatment of any abnormalities. However, many people don't have access to the care that they need for a variety of reasons.

Latino and African American children, regardless of their insurance status, experience longer intervals between dental visits than white children (Pourat & Finocchio, 2010). Children with tooth decay can face pain, infection, nutritional problems, sleep deprivation, and struggles with concentration, learning, and growth (Pourat & Finocchio, 2010). Access to adequate dental care and services can significantly reduce tooth decay and thus lead to improved school attendance, overall better quality of life, and reduced financial and societal costs (Pourat & Finocchio, 2010).

Why do oral health disparities exist in communities of color?

Health disparities are driven further by social and economic inequities.

People of color tend to be enrolled in more affordable health plans that are of lower quality, defined by limited resources and stricter restrictions on covered services (Minorities, 2002). Minority patients are less likely to afford high copayments or deductibles associated with treatment costs and insurance coverage.

In addition, minority communities are less likely to have a consistent and established relationship with a primary care provider largely due to the absence of doctors with diverse backgrounds, despite being insured at the same level as their white counterparts (Minorities, 2002).

Solutions and initiatives to reach health equity:

Healthcare providers play an important role in patient care and should make a constant effort to be aware of their own implicit biases, while practicing cultural humility to understand the distinct cultural backgrounds of their patients.

Fostering diversity within the dental workforce and increasing the representation of professionals from diverse backgrounds can build trust and ensure culturally competent care. Having a dental professional from a similar background as the patient is correlated with greater patient participation, satisfaction, and trust. Language barriers between patients and healthcare providers can often lead to miscommunication and frustration for both parties.



As a daughter of immigrants whose first language is not English, I was responsible for interpreting for my parents during medical and dental appointments. I witnessed how the lack of effective communication between my parents and their healthcare providers due to language barriers have resulted in low treatment adherence, incorrect diagnoses, additional treatment costs, which added to their overall dissatisfaction with healthcare services. The burden of translating medical and dental vocabulary should not fall on children. Interpreters should be made available in clinics and hospitals for neighborhoods with a large population of foreign-language speaking patients to overcome language barriers and provide quality care. Online translation tools such as Google Translate and MediBabble have also made significant headway in some healthcare organizations for their efforts to help overcome language barriers and establish trusting relationships with patients (Al Shamsi et al., 2020).

I'm a first-generation college student and the first in my family to pursue dentistry. There are many unique challenges that come with being the first to pave the way for your future. First-generation pre-dental students have the tough task of figuring out dental school applications, the DAT, shadowing, and networking all by themselves. As a first-year transfer student, I found it difficult to get involved in dental related extracurriculars at UCLA so I took the initiative to create my own student organization called First-Gen Dentists at UCLA. First-Gen Dentists at UCLA is dedicated to supporting and empowering pre-dental students who are first in their family to become dentists. It's important to find your community and support network, which is why I'm committed to providing and sharing resources, mentorship and networking opportunities necessary to excel in this demanding profession with my fellow first-generation community.

As pre-dental students, we have the opportunity to volunteer and make a positive impact in underserved communities. Mobile dental clinics and community health centers can bridge the gap by providing dental services to communities in need. We can get involved in organizations on campus that are committed to empowering these communities and helping pre-dental students flourish in their journey to the field of dentistry. Together, by dismantling the systemic barriers to dental care and focusing our attention on underserved communities, we can pave the way for a future where oral health is a right, not a privilege.

Brushing Away Stress:

12

Dentistry, Art, and Mental Health

The journey toward a career in dentistry is demanding, characterized by rigorous academic challenges and high-stakes clinical practice. These pressures often lead to stress, burnout, and feelings of isolation among dental professionals and students. Recognizing these challenges has driven me to explore holistic well-being for myself, my future patients, and my colleagues. This exploration led me to an unexpected yet transformative intersection: the power of art to promote mental health within the dental community.



As a pre-dental student, my journey has been enriched by involvement in various pre-dental organizations, including the Pre-Dental Student Outreach Program (PDSOP), the Pre-Dental Society, and Students United for America's Toothfairy (SUAT). These organizations provide platforms for aspiring dental professionals to connect, collaborate, and make a difference in their communities. Through these experiences, I have witnessed the profound impact dentistry can have on individuals of all ages and backgrounds.

In my quest to bridge the gap between dentistry and emotional well-being, I joined The Foundation of Art & Healing's Young Adult Advisory Council. Here, I spearheaded a workshop at UCLA titled "Colors & Connection," aimed at addressing loneliness among college students. This endeavor unexpectedly intertwined my passion for dentistry with the therapeutic nature of art. At the heart of the workshop was the belief that creativity transcends disciplines and backgrounds. Participants, including fellow pre-dental students and individuals from various academic fields, gathered to explore the healing power of art. Through coloring exercises and meaningful discussions, we discovered that both dentistry and art serve as vehicles for expression and healing.



Julia Son
UCLA '25



As a future dentist, I have seen firsthand the toll that stress and burnout can take on dental professionals. The demands of patient care, combined with academic and clinical pressures, often lead to feelings of anxiety and isolation. However, through art and creativity, we found a means of catharsis - a way to channel our emotions and connect with others on a deeper level. One particularly poignant moment during the workshop was when a fellow pre-dental student shared her struggles with imposter syndrome and self-doubt. Through our activities with colors, she found solace in the supportive environment we had cultivated, realizing she was not alone in her journey. In that moment, dentistry ceased to be just a career path; it became a conduit for empathy and healing.

The parallels between dentistry and art became increasingly apparent as we explored the intricate relationship between creativity and mental health. Just as a skilled artist wields a brush to create a masterpiece, a compassionate dentist uses their hands to restore smiles and alleviate pain. Both professions require patience, empathy, and a deep understanding of the human experience. Reflecting on my journey toward dentistry, I have gained a newfound appreciation for the therapeutic value of creative expression. Through "Colors & Connection," I have realized the importance of integrating art-based activities into our routines as future dental professionals.

The intersection of dentistry, art, and mental health is a rich tapestry woven with threads of creativity, compassion, and resilience. By embracing the beauty of art, we can brush away the stresses of everyday life and cultivate a community of healing and support within the dental profession.

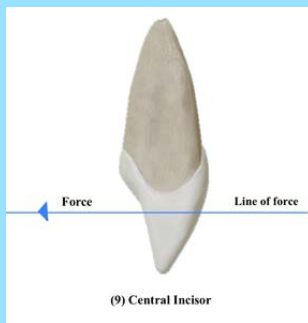


The Hidden Forces Shaping Orthodontics

13

As aspiring dentists, our focus is often on the biological aspects of oral health. However, a whole world is at play beneath the surface - one governed by the laws of physics. From the use of imaging technologies to the intricacies of bite forces, it is surprising to see that physics is deeply intertwined with every aspect of dentistry. This is particularly evident in orthodontics, where physics principles are applied to predict tooth movement and prevent undesirable side effects.

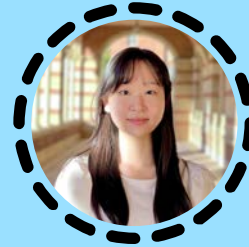
When force is applied to a tooth, a series of biomedical responses occur within the periodontal ligament and the surrounding bone. In our physics classes, we learn to represent this force as a vector with both a magnitude and direction. The point of application, or the origin of the vector, is a crucial factor in determining whether the tooth will translate or rotate under the force. This understanding allows orthodontists to predict the direction and magnitude of a tooth's movement based on how the force is applied to a bracket attached to a tooth, just like the movement depicted in the image below (Kousaie & Retrouvey, 2021).



In this image, the line of force represents the axis of displacement. Physics shows us that two forces of equal amplitude, pointing in the same direction and on the same line of force, will have the same effect on the object. The net effect on the object is identical regardless of whether the force is pushing or pulling. Additionally, the law of transmissibility of force indicates that the impact of a force on the object is equivalent as long as it is applied along the same line of force. So, using force on different points of application, such as on the bracket or the incisal edge of a tooth, wouldn't matter if the force is in the same direction and has the same magnitude (Kousaie & Retrouvey, 2021). While this concept may seem obvious at first glance, the complex world of physics is what makes orthodontics possible!

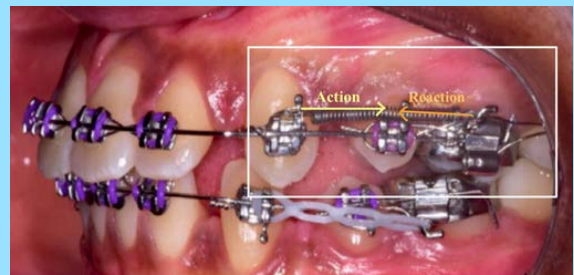
Image citation: (Effects of Mechanical Vibrations on Maxillary Canine Retraction and Perceived Pain: A Pilot, Single-center, Randomized-controlled Clinical Trial SpringerLink, n.d.)

Effects of mechanical vibrations on maxillary canine retraction and perceived pain: a pilot, single-center, randomized-controlled clinical trial SpringerLink. (n.d.). sellilar.live. https://sellilar.live/product_details/4605126.html
Retrouvey, Jean-Marc & Kousaie, Katherine. (2021). Physics in Orthodontics. 10.13140/RG.2.2.29754.72640.



Sydney Min
UCLA '25

It doesn't end here. In orthodontics, Newton's laws explain the effects of forces on the tooth. Newton's Third Law of Motion states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Through this principle, we can understand that two interacting objects exert action and reaction forces on each other, and these forces are equal in size but opposite in direction. In fact, orthodontists use this law to predict and prevent undesirable side effects in braces.



This image shows a canine retraction setup where the spring is pulling the canine back. However, the spring uses the molars as an anchorage, which causes a force that pulls the molars forward in the same magnitude as the initial force (Kousaie & Retrouvey, 2021). Because these action and reaction forces that place the system in equilibrium may cause side effects, orthodontists use this law to minimize unforeseen reactive forces during treatment planning. This emphasizes the crucial role of physics principles in providing safe and effective dental care.

Undoubtedly, the basic principles of physics form a crucial foundation for orthodontics. While the movement of teeth is subject to complex force systems that are difficult to predict, the biomechanical aspect of orthodontics remains an essential part of dentistry that provides a framework for clinical applications. Without a solid grasp of physics principles, navigating the complexities of dental care and achieving optimal patient outcomes would be challenging. However, by embracing the scientific foundation that underpins dentistry, we, as dental professionals, continue to innovate, refine techniques, and provide patients with the highest standard of care.

Changing One Smile at a Time



Galia Odabashian
Pepperdine
University '26

Growing up, going to the orthodontist was always my favorite dental appointment. Being able to pick my own color of elastics every month was always something I looked forward to, and unlike other appointments, I was always in and out of the office quickly. I had no idea how much of an impact those fifteen minute appointments made on my teeth. When I decided to pursue pre-dental, I reached out to various dentists and specialties to explore my interests. This is how I fell in love with the practice of orthodontics.

Orthodontics is a specialized field of dentistry that focuses on diagnosing, preventing, and correcting misaligned teeth and jaws. Orthodontists use various techniques, such as braces, aligners, and other dental appliances, to straighten teeth, correct bites, and improve overall dental health and aesthetics. The goal of orthodontic treatment is to achieve a functional and harmonious bite, enhance facial appearance, and maintain good oral health.

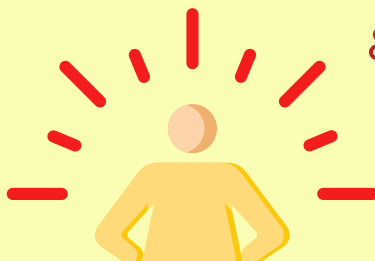
One of my favorite aspects of orthodontic practice is the consistent interaction with patients on a monthly basis. Unlike other dental specialties where encounters might be sporadic, orthodontic treatment demands frequent visits. These regular appointments provide an opportunity for the doctor to form genuine patient-doctor relationships that extend beyond the dental setting. As I observed the orthodontist engaging with patients, it became evident that these appointments were more than just adjustments to wires and brackets.

They were moments of connection, where the orthodontist took the time to understand not just the dental concerns but also the individual behind the smile. Each visit became a chapter in the ongoing narrative of transformation, where progress was measured not just in millimeters of tooth movement but in the confidence and self-assurance radiating from patients.

The role of an orthodontist is quite different from that of other dental specialties as they work on boosting self-esteem of patients. Many patients seek orthodontic treatment not just for functional reasons but also to enhance their appearance and confidence. Witnessing the transformative power of orthodontics, I saw how a seemingly subtle change in tooth alignment could profoundly impact a person's self-image.

During my time shadowing, I delved into the technical aspects of orthodontic care, from changing ligatures to understanding tooth anatomy. Every adjustment, every manipulation of wires and brackets, was a step towards achieving a functional and aesthetic bite. I learned about the intricate balance between forces and biology that govern tooth movement, realizing that orthodontics is as much an art as it is a science.

Putting on braces involves cleaning and drying the teeth before applying a bonding material to secure the brackets in place. Each bracket, carefully positioned according to the treatment plan, is then affixed to the teeth before a curing light is used to harden the adhesive. Once the brackets are secure, an arch wire is inserted into the brackets and secured with elastic bands or ligatures. Patients come back monthly to refresh ligatures (single tie or power chain) or to change the wire.



In orthodontics, two common types of wires used for braces are nickel-titanium (NiTi) and stainless steel. While nickel-titanium wires are known for their flexibility and elasticity, stainless steel wires are more rigid and durable, making them suitable for applying greater forces to guide the teeth into their desired positions. It is amazing to see how new technologies have led to advances in orthodontics. Aligners, such as those provided by companies like Invisalign, have emerged as a popular choice for individuals seeking a more discreet and comfortable orthodontic solution. These clear, removable aligners gradually straighten teeth without the need for traditional metal braces, offering greater flexibility and convenience to patients. The shift towards digital dentistry has also eliminated the need for dental impressions using materials like alginate. Instead, intraoral scanners are now used to create highly accurate digital models of patients' mouths, streamlining the treatment process and improving patient comfort.



Orthodontics is not just about straightening teeth; it's about transforming lives and instilling confidence in patients. From the joy of picking monthly colors to the profound impact on self-esteem, orthodontic treatment goes beyond mere dental adjustments. The consistent interaction between orthodontists and patients fosters genuine relationships, enhancing the overall experience and outcomes. As technology continues to advance, orthodontics evolves, offering more options like clear aligners and digital impressions for greater comfort and precision. Through my journey into the world of orthodontics, I've come to appreciate the artistry and science behind every adjustment, recognizing the significant role orthodontists play in shaping not just smiles but also self-assurance.



FOLLOW US!

***Find us on Instagram
@ucla_asda_predental for
upcoming pre-dental
committee events!
The sign-up link can be
found in our Instagram bio.***