

SIU SDM students awarded for research excellence

May 21 2018 2:46 PM



ALTON - The Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) prides itself on providing a high-quality, service-focused education that is built on a

foundation of research and clinical experiences that form the basis for professional practice.

Two SIU SDM students have gained national attention for their research excellence. Second year student Luke Revelt, of Edwardsville, earned the 2018 American Association for Dental Research ([AADR](#)) Student Research Fellowship.

Third year student Vidhi Pandya, of Bloomington, has been presented the 2018 Odontographic Society of Chicago's Dr. Irwin B. Robinson Award for Student-Researcher Excellence.

"Research drives dentistry, and allows students to think of the bigger picture, the global impact," said the students' research mentor Anita Joy, BDS, PhD, associate professor and director of the SIU SDM Office of Research. "Our student-researchers' ideas and hard work are what will eventually revolutionize clinical practice. What may seem like a low-key project, in the long run, may have a significant impact on how they will treat patients and potentially change the face of therapeutics and diagnostics."

"It is important that we publicly acknowledge students who set themselves apart by going beyond what is required in their program," said Bruce Rotter, DMD, SIU SDM dean. "Dentistry is a dynamic profession which is evidence-based. These students' immersion into their research has not only distinguished them among their colleagues, but also positioned them for the future practice of dentistry."

Revelt's research seeks to stop salivary gland cancer from spreading and increase the survival rate of the afflicted. Through his fellowship, he will work with Joy on expanded research opportunities.

"Over 3,000 people are diagnosed with salivary gland cancer every year in the U.S.," he explained. "However, this survival rate varies from 91 percent to 39 percent according to how early the cancer is detected, and whether it has started to spread outside the salivary gland.

"Last summer, I helped Dr. Joy by confirming that the TWIST protein is critical to the signal cascade that enables the progression of cancerous cells in the salivary glands toward metastasis. My next step is to confirm if TWIST is involved in cell apoptosis."

Revelt describes his dental studies as intense but says conducting research allows him to "unplug from our regimen and reset my mind" as his understanding of dentistry grows.

"I find conducting research, attending and participating in dental conferences, and even reading the AADR and other journals, help me expand my knowledge of dentistry

beyond that which we are taught during our four-year dental education,” he said. “Research is teaching me how to innovate and network to become a better dentist once I am practicing.”

Fellow student-researcher Pandya has also been applauded for her impressive exploratory activities. The Odontographic Society of Chicago Research and Education Foundation presents its annual award to one student-researcher from each Illinois College of School of Dentistry in recognition of their research efforts during their dental education.

Pandya has investigated the feasibility of using a novel 3D tissue model to replicate in the lab the dynamics of human gingival tissue. Her research has shown that the tissue model is a viable tool to study gingival diseases in the lab.

“I find periodontology and its related aspects to be quite interesting,” Pandya said. “There’s so much cutting-edge information out there that we’re not necessarily taught, because it’s so new. It’s through my research experiences that I have cultivated the skills to understand what new technologies exist and contributed to industry innovation. This knowledge and experience will help build my future practice.”

[The SIU School of Dental Medicine](#) students manage approximately 35,000 patient visits each year at its patient clinics in Alton and East St. Louis. In addition, students offer oral health treatment, screenings and education to more than 10,000 people annually through a wide variety of off-campus community outreach events. These opportunities provide students the training they need to graduate and become highly skilled dentists. The School of Dental Medicine is a vital oral health care provider for residents of southern and central Illinois, and the St. Louis metropolitan region.