

# Their final year

Pandemic brings changes to University of Maryland fourth-year dental students' return to campus

**Editor's note:** In November 2017, the ADA News launched *Becoming a Dentist*, a series of stories that follows three dental students at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry — Dan Yang, LaShonda Shepherd and Ben Horn — during their journeys to becoming dentists. See all the stories in the series at [ADA.org/BeADentist](http://ADA.org/BeADentist).

**BY JENNIFER GARVIN**

It finally happened.

From their first days of dental anatomy to learning how to deliver anesthetic to their initiation to the dental clinic, LaShonda, Dan and Ben have evolved from wide-eyed newbies to “veteran” fourth-year students.

Now they're the ones expected to know all the answers.

“It feels surreal to be a D4, especially during a pandemic,” LaShonda said. “This is uncharted territory, and we're figuring things out as we go.”

The first thing waiting for them was seeing patients again.

Beginning in mid-March, the University of Maryland School of Dentistry's clinics were limited to emergencies only, and patients were treated by faculty and residents. UM-SOD gradually began re-opening in early July under new protocols for COVID-19 that the school says meet or exceed those mandated by state and federal guidelines, including limiting the number of patients seen and restricting visitors. Patients, who must wear face masks, also are screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperatures taken before entering the clinics.

“The schedule has changed around a bit due to social distancing, but I believe the school has done a great job adapting and making it possible to safely see our patients despite all the required precautions,” Ben



**New normal:** University of Maryland School of Dentistry students show off their PPE. Clockwise from left are Ben, Dan and LaShonda.

said.

In the clinics, which were designed with an air exchange rate of 15 times an hour, every oral health care provider must wear personal protective equipment, including gown; gloves; a fit-tested N95 or elastomeric respirator; face shield; and hair covering when treating patients.

Additionally, fewer patient visits are scheduled, which allows space for social distancing and time for thorough disinfection between sessions; and the ratio of faculty-to-students in the clinics has been increased, which allows faculty to spend more time with each student and improves efficiency.

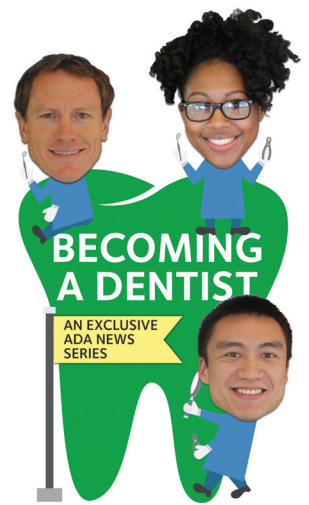
The school noted that air-purifying devices also have been strategically placed throughout the clinics, and high-volume, extra-oral suc-

sion devices, called evacuators, are used chair-side to limit the aerosol produced by many dental procedures.

The students aren't the only ones happy to be back on campus. So are their patients.

“Most of them have been open to coming back in and resuming treatment,” LaShonda said. “I have seen several of the patients that were scheduled before we shut down. Plus, I've had an influx of new patients transferred from the Class of 2020, so I've been pretty busy.”

“One patient had been wearing a flipper for his maxillary central incisors for close to a year while waiting for implant crowns to be inserted,” Ben said. “Those were delivered to him in August, but he would have had them in March had it not been for the pandemic. He



was very happy to have the crowns cemented, and it felt great to get him his front teeth.”

When they're not in the clinic, the students attend classes, sometimes live streamed, other times prerecorded.

“We definitely live in a different world than we used to,” Dan

said. “It's a relief to return to some sense of normalcy, seeing my classmates and the faculty, but the impact of COVID-19 is strong and prevalent in our lives at school. We are all working to adapt to the current circumstances. I am grateful in the trust that faculty place in us now as D4s to be proficient student dentists in our clinic.”

LaShonda admitted she was a little hesitant to come back to campus at first, but once back, she was happy to see that the dentistry stayed the same.

“I was just starting to get into my groove before the shutdown, and it felt like we would be returning to an entirely new system,” she said. “I also worried about being able to practice safely. We have to take a few more precautions now and wear a lot more PPE, but the dentistry didn't change. That was reassuring. Wearing masks for eight hours straight has taken some getting used to, but I'm happy to get back into the swing of things.”

There are some pros to the new normal, like shorter clinic sessions and more one-on-one time with faculty.

“It forces us to be more efficient, and I believe this will better prepare us for the ‘real world,’” LaShonda said. “And I am someone who likes to plan out my appointments, so this system works for me.”

The students also have to study for Part II of the dental board before deciding whether to apply for residencies. Ben spent the latter part of the summer studying for the exam, which he took at the end of August. Dan and LaShonda are planning to take the exam later this year.

“I overlapped studying and being in the clinic for only two weeks, and it was nice to get the exam out of the way. The exam covered every discipline of clinical dentistry, so it was a lot, but we were exposed to everything during the didactic and clinical training at school,” he said. “Being fourth-year is a great feeling. It's a nice feeling to know that with a lot of hard work in the next nine months, we will be graduating.”

After being interviewed for this story, Ben found out he passed the exam. ■

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## ADA Morning Huddle debuts new look

### Family of e-newsletters includes enhanced functionality

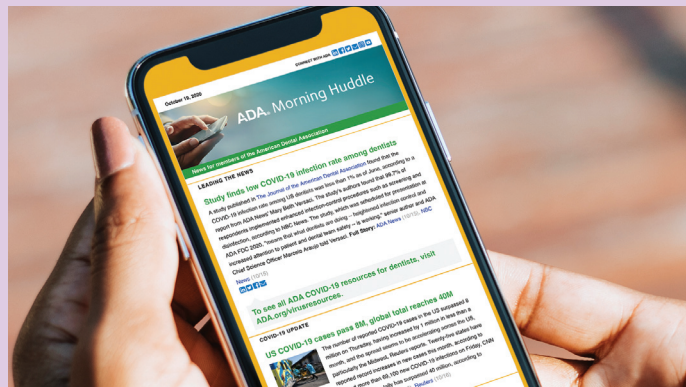
**BY DAVID BURGER**

The ADA unveiled Nov. 2 a new look for ADA's Morning Huddle and the family of ADA Huddle e-newsletters.

The Huddles, while featuring a refreshed look and increased functionality, now allow readers to share their favorite stories through social media, respond to polls that take the pulse of the profession on the issues of the day and access ADA's multimedia video and audio programming.

The ADA Morning Huddle will continue to bring summaries of the latest news and information from national outlets as well as exclusive member-only content from the ADA, including breaking daily news from ADA News and highlights from The Journal of the American Dental Association, New Dentist News and Dental Practice Success.

Subscribers will continue to receive the ADA Morning Huddle Monday through



Saturday mornings, and readers will still receive the latest news and resources for practice management, business, and work-life balance every Saturday in the ADA Finance & Operations Huddle.

In addition, the ADA announced that the family of ADA Huddles is growing. Soon,

new dentists and dental students can look forward to a new Huddle geared to their unique needs, with the launch of the ADA New Dentist Weekly Huddle — a compendium of valuable professional, financial and business insights for students and early-career dentists.

The ADA Morning Huddle and the family of ADA Huddle newsletters will be delivered from the email domain @smartbrief.com. To verify ADA Morning Huddle subscription status or share feedback, contact the ADA Member Service Center at MSC@ADA.org. ■