



The Student Research Experience at Dalhousie

By Mark Filiaggi, BSc Eng, MA Sc, PhD

The student research experience remains one of the most influential tools for fostering an interest in an academic career in oral health, an important career option that can help maintain the relevancy and overall health of our profession. In this regard, Dalhousie University provides abundant opportunities for students in our dental and dental hygiene programs to cultivate research interests.

Through our summer research program, students are offered a challenging, collaborative and supportive environment in which to explore and develop an oral health research project that complements their professional training. The program taps into a broad spectrum of research activities available within the faculty. Whether assisting with survey development and implementation or feeding and manipulating cells, our students engage in a varied and rewarding research experience.

As part of this program, students have an opportunity to participate in interprofessional workshops on research information and skills that connect them to the broader health sciences research community. These workshops are one component of the Integrated Health Research Training Partnership (IH RTP)—a collaborative effort involving all 3 Dalhousie health faculties and affiliated teaching hospitals. The IH RTP is designed to support the research careers of student trainees, junior faculty or faculty new to research, through interprofessional workshops, research skills seminars and lectures. The culmination of the summer research program is the Health Sciences Research Day which takes place in February of the following year and involves students from the faculties of dentistry, health professions and medicine.

Students can also become involved in research through our Scholarship Across the Curriculum (SAC) program—an evidence-based dentistry curriculum that allows our trainees to address new or controversial oral health issues and practices through table clinic presentations to the dental community and to disseminate this knowledge in scientific publications. Faculty-mentored research electives are also available, allowing students motivated by their own queries to pursue independent research projects.

A vital, responsive and progressive health profession requires faculty members and students who remain actively engaged in the process of new discoveries. By engaging our students through these various research programs and activities, we hope they can see how their contributions as academic clinicians can help shape the future of oral health care in this country. ♦

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Melanie McLeod (above right) with her poster on the proper use of composite curing lights at the faculty's annual Table Clinic. Ms. McLeod's study placed second in the 2008 CDA/Dentsply Student Clinician Research Program.



Matthew MacLeod (foreground) and Gordon Hall, a faculty technician, prepare to mechanically test flamed superelastic nickel-titanium orthodontic archwires. Dr. MacLeod is currently doing post-graduate studies at the University of Toronto.