

NEW ALUMNI FOCUS

Srinivas Susarla, DMD '07, MPH '07

A budding academic, Srinivas Susarla enjoys the mix of teaching, research, and patient care.

WITH A CLINICIAN MOTHER (an internist) and a professor father (a statistician), it's no surprise that Srinivas Susarla is headed for a career as an academic in a health-related field. "I'm a hybrid of my parents," he jokes.

Before he gets there, however, he must complete a six-year residency in oral and maxillofacial surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). The residency is offered to only three applicants per year who are committed to a career of excellence in patient care, teaching, and research; those selected are simultaneously accepted into Harvard Medical School.



While all this sounds like an enormous amount of work, Susarla is not daunted. "I found my niche in academia," he says. "It hits all three of my areas of interest: teaching, research, and patient care. It's nice to wake up for work every day and say that you enjoy what you do."

He finds teaching to be especially important. "To truly understand something," he believes, "you have to be able to teach it." He appreciated the HSDM curriculum, with its problem-based learning. "You have to research and bring your results back to the group," he notes. "I found it to be a great experience. I learned how to fine-tune explanations." It's also important for clinical work.

During the residency, Susarla will spend one year at the hospital, finish the last two years of Harvard Medical School, and finally complete the oral and maxillofacial surgery training for the remaining three years of the residency. In addition to his DMD and MPH, he will also earn an MD degree.

"When you have patients with very different backgrounds," he stresses, "you have to be able to make everyone understand their disease so the treatment will be successful."

Susarla is currently a fellow in clinical investigation at MGH, having been awarded a prestigious fellowship from the MGH Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and the Center for Applied Clinical Investigation. The grant is a two-year curriculum, during which the fellow pursues coursework at the Harvard School of Public Health while conducting original, independent clinical research. The curriculum leads to a master's in public health from HSPH and a certificate from MGH. The fellowship is sponsored by the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Foundation.

Susarla enjoyed his teaching experiences in college and at HSDM. In dentistry, he believes, good teaching derives not only from books but also from hands-on and personal experience. "Anything clinically related has a human aspect," he says. "It lends a more personal component. I can make a real impact on someone's life, especially with oral and maxillofacial surgery."

Although Susarla has not yet decided on a specific area of clinical interest, he knows that it will evolve during his training. "I have really enjoyed my experience at HSDM," he says, as he heads out to new horizons. "For someone interested in research or an academic career, there's no better place." ■