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REFLECTIONS FROM THE CLINIC:

GROWTH, CHALLENGES, AND LESSONS LEARNED IN DENTAL EDUCATION

Anneliese Goetz, VCU School of Dentistry, Class of 2025

As we enter the first weeks of this year's summer clinic, it feels like an appropriate time to reflect on what we have learned this past year and what we hope to learn in the coming year. This time last year, the Class of 2025 was just beginning to see our first patients in the clinic. Although we spent time in the clinic during our first and second years assisting our third and fourth year "vertical buddies" and completing simple operative and periodontal procedures, stepping into the clinic during those first few weeks of the third-year summer semester was daunting to say the least. Third-year students have to become acquainted with the nuances of axiUm software, learn how to manage and schedule patients and start to form relationships with our clinical faculty, all while carrying out high-quality dental care. It all felt extremely overwhelming at the start, but things gradually became easier and less stressful.

Reflecting on this past year, it's remarkable how much we've grown both personally and professionally. The transition from preclinical coursework to clinical practice is a significant milestone in our dental education journey. We've gone from learning about dental procedures in theory and practicing them on mannequins to actually performing them on real patients. The responsibility that comes with providing dental care to individuals is not lost on us, and it's something we take very seriously. One of the most valuable lessons we've learned is the importance of communication and teamwork in the clinical setting.

Whether it's collaborating with faculty members to develop treatment plans or working closely with our peers during patient care, effective communication is key to delivering the best possible outcomes for our patients. We've also come to appreciate the value of seeking feedback and continuously striving to improve our skills and knowledge.

Another aspect of clinic life that we've had to adapt to is the use of technology in dental practice. In particular, axiUm software has become an integral part of our daily routine. From patient charting to treatment planning to scheduling appointments, we rely on this software to streamline our workflow and ensure that we're providing efficient and effective care to our patients. While there was definitely a learning curve in the beginning, we now feel much more comfortable navigating the various features of axiUm.

Looking ahead to the year to come, there is still much more for us to learn and experience. We're excited to continue honing our clinical skills and expanding our knowledge base across various areas of dentistry. Whether it's mastering new techniques in restorative dentistry, delving deeper into the intricacies of periodontal therapy, or exploring emerging technologies in the field, we're eager to embrace the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. In addition to clinical proficiency, we also recognize the importance of developing strong patient rapport and chairside manners. Building trust and rapport with our patients not only enhances their overall experience but

also plays a crucial role in achieving successful treatment outcomes. We're committed to fostering meaningful connections with our patients and providing them with compassionate, patient-centered care.

As we embark on this next year of our dental education journey, we're grateful for the support and guidance of our faculty mentors, our classmates, and the entire dental community. Together, we will continue to learn, grow, and strive for excellence in everything we do. With each patient encounter, we are reminded of the privilege and responsibility that comes with being a dental professional, and we are committed to upholding the highest standards of care in service to our patients and our profession.