

DVI's ARAB ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM TAKES FLIGHT DURING PANDEMIC

DVI remained open THROUGHOUT the pandemic - yes, the whole time. How? In 2019 DVI had 140 volunteers from 19 different countries – in 2020, foreign dentists were only able to come for the first two months of the year and despite that, DVI had 56 volunteer dentists in 2020! Part of this is down to DVI's Arab Advancement Project truly taking flight during the pandemic. Funded originally by the Kathryn Ames Foundation and now partly by the Israeli Arkin Family Foundation, this program is dedicated to the professional advancement of minority groups, specifically Arab Israeli and Palestinian dentists, who struggle to gain acceptance to these highly competitive pediatric dentistry tracks and to find their first professional position within Israeli society.

Arab and Palestinian dentists in Israel usually study for their dental degrees in Jordan, Ukraine or other foreign countries. While they are motivated to improve themselves, they discover that their foreign degrees enable them only lower-level positions, if they can find work at all; this is even more pronounced with Arab women. Hadassah Dental School's Pediatric Specialization program, for example, accepts only six candidates a year. It is so competitive that even with an affirmative action policy, dentists with less respected foreign degrees cannot hope to gain acceptance to these programs. In the last five to ten years, DVI has become the pathway to success for the tenacious among these dentists; if they ask what they might do to gain acceptance in specialization programs and employment, they are informed that volunteering at DVI for a few years is the way. Additionally, many dentists seek to improve their skills to be competitive for their first job or for higher paying jobs; when Dr. Petel sees significant progress, he writes recommendations, which have been extremely effective. Indeed, several dentists successfully participate in the program every year purely for this reason. Dr. Petel says "Today many dentists are coming out of the Arab and Palestinian communities, and many are ambitious enough to want to go for a

specialization. It is wonderful to be able to help them improve their dentistry, so that they can achieve their career goals."

While the benefits of program participation and volunteering under the supervision of dentists like Drs Petel and Palmon, who both teach dentistry at the Hebrew University at Hadassah School of Dental Medicine, and alongside dentists from North America and around the world are obvious, scheduling volunteer shifts at DVI presents a greater hurdle. Normally, DVI is full to capacity with foreign volunteer dentists and pediatric residents (via the Residents' Program, which is now a national program at DVI). However, during the pandemic, with foreign dentists unable to GET to Israel, DVI had to switch gears and recruit locally. DVI's director Dr. Roy Petel ramped up the Arab Advancement Program, and ultimately more than doubled this cohort of Palestinian and Arab Israeli volunteer dentists, many of whom began taking a weekly or monthly shift. As a result, many were able to advance significantly in their dentistry to earn a recommendation. Instead of the usual 5-10 Palestinian and Arab dentists, DVI had 15 of them in the last year! Volunteer Coordinator Sharon Spira and Office Manager Talia Vilensky are working to maintain this higher number of participants. Spira notes that "in 2020, due to budget cuts, we downsized from 3 to 2 volunteer apartments. Therefore, we have more shifts available with an open dental chair and dental assistant, that are being available to program participants. Participants have such a positive experience at DVI that they typically recommend volunteering at DVI to their friends and colleagues."

Between March 2020 and July 2021, Drs Priscilla Hilu, Firas Khalaily, Maria Ahmad, and Mohammed Sabayeh volunteered on a weekly basis, while Drs Muhammad Hamoodi, Mustafa AbuDalou, Rim Abuteer, Jamal Jabarin, Ala Natsheh, Amal Asad, and Rowan Matar volunteered once or twice a month. Drs Mohammed Dwet, Sari Abu Gosh, Mohammed Abu Gosh, and Maggad Abu

Gosh also participated during the last year.

After volunteering with DVI throughout the entire pandemic, Dr. Maria Ahmad received a recommendation from DVI directors, and on May 30th, 2021, on a day she was in the clinic volunteering at DVI, Dr. Ahmad was accepted to the Pediatric Residency Program at Hebrew University at Hadassah School of Dental Medicine! Dr. Maria Ahmad grew up in Nazareth, and completed her dental degree at the American University in Jenin in 2017. Maria dreams of becoming a pediatric dentist, and she works exclusively with children in her job at Maccabi Dent (an HMO dental clinic) in Holon (in the center of the country). She made inquiries, and she felt that with her undergraduate degree, she had no chance of ever being accepted to the pediatric program. She heard about DVI's Arab Advancement project only after she had already begun volunteering at DVI, for the experience. Pediatric dentists had suggested that if she volunteer at DVI, her work opportunities would improve. When she contacted DVI about volunteering, the clinic director explained that foreign dentists are not able to come and that currently there is a great need for local volunteers, so she agreed to come once or twice a week, as long as we need her. Maria is excited about the possibility of studying in the pediatric program, but she humbly still does not really imagine it to be a genuine possibility for her. Maria is still single, so she is not sure where she will end up living one day, when she is married, but...in her wildest fantasies, she would keep working, be accepted to the pediatric program, complete it, and move back up north.

Dr. Petel instructs and oversees her dentistry, as with all of the others in the program, but so do other supervising dentists, like Professor Emeritus Dr. Gideon Holan, who taught pediatric dentistry at Hadassah for 40 years, and sat on the admissions committee. Maria asks them questions about the work she's doing, observes their dentistry, and listens. Dr. Ahmad also observed her fellow volunteer

dentist's work, a new immigrant from New York, Dr. Harry Harcsztark, and had many questions for him; he's used to instructing, and he was impressed by her attention to detail. She's extremely inquisitive!

Dr. Firas Khalailiy studied at the Hadassah School of Dental Medicine, where he first met DVI's director, Dr. Roy Petel as an instructor at the undergraduate clinic. He also met his wife there who was studying to be a doctor at the time! Firas, who comes from the northern Arab city of Sakhnin, moved to Jerusalem during his studies and remained in the city for an additional year when he enrolled in an advanced program for general dental practitioners. Part of this program included advising others students in Arabic. Dr. Khalailiy felt so good about helping his peers, that he continued in this role of advisor for a year after completing the program. With the birth of his first child, Firas and his wife decided to return to their home in the north so that as busy professionals they would have the support of their extended family. However, since Dr. Khalailiy's professional work was Jerusalem based, he scheduled double shifts in the Jerusalem clinics where he works and splits his time between Sakhnin and Jerusalem. In an effort to transition to the north, he has also added a clinic shift in Nahariya.

Dr. Fadi Saad, himself a rising pediatric dentist who successfully completed the Arab Advancement Program himself, then became a DVI pediatric resident and continues to volunteer at DVI today, despite his upward career trajectory, was Firas' supervisor in the Meuhedet Clinic where he began his professional career. At the time, Dr. Saad was the director of the Meuhedet kupat holim dental clinic. Firas was so impressed by Dr. Saad's skills, that he asked how he became such an expert pediatric dentist. "Dr. Saad credited DVI with his expertise in dealing with children, and encouraged me to volunteer at DVI and consider applying to the pediatric dental specialty program," explained Dr. Khalailiy. Firas now leaves his home in the north on Mondays and stays in

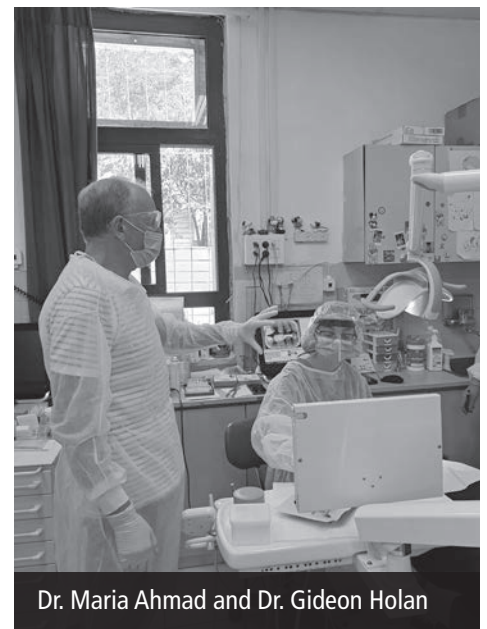
Jerusalem overnight in order to volunteer at DVI on Tuesday mornings. He is committed to advancing his career so that he can bring new approaches and techniques back to his hometown of Sakhnin. He describes his experience at DVI as "extraordinarily rewarding", explaining that "with the supervision and new techniques I've learned here (at DVI), I am often able to treat a child who would otherwise be put under general anesthesia, something I believe should not be done when there are other options." This satisfaction, and Firas' own success in treating even very troubled or special needs children and youth at DVI, pushed him to pursue specializing in pediatric dentistry. Dr. Firas Khalailiy has just been accepted to the first class of a pediatric specialty program opening in Tel Hashomer Hospital in July 2021. DVI staff and project donors look forward to accompanying Dr. Khalailiy professionally as he pursues a specialty and to the secondary benefit of this program, when he ultimately uses his skills to bring new techniques and practices to his own local underserved community.

Receptionist Talia Vilensky is responsible for recruiting 'last minute local' dentists to fill day shifts, thus has talked to all of them by phone and in person for many years, "I am always impressed by the dentists who live far away and drive such a distance to volunteer at DVI for a day, bringing sweets for the staff, the respect and kindness with which they speak to all the staff and patients. Drs. Firas and Ahmad particularly impressed me with their ongoing willingness to volunteer, even after they received a recommendation letter from Dr. Petel and DVI and were admitted to the specialization programs. I know that these two dentists will be as successful as they want to be, and rise to any height, in Israel."

Michelle Levine



Dr. Ahmad and Dr. H



Dr. Maria Ahmad and Dr. Gideon Holan