

the Maine Dental Association, who helped Alto build dental training into the residency.

Cavities: One goal of giving young doctors some dental training, Alto explains, is simply to get them interested in looking in the mouth for oral cancers and lesions, as well as cavities and other problems with the teeth. Research has shown that poor oral health may be linked to broader health issues, such as cardiovascular problems and premature labor, and may also be associated with diabetes, osteoporosis, eating disorders, and several other illnesses.

In March 2009, the *New York Times* profiled the Maine-Dartmouth dental initiative, noting that “Maine has one dentist for every 2,300 people. . . . Nationally there is one dentist for every 1,600 people.”

Dentists are also in short supply in northern New Hampshire and northern Vermont. Most of the dentists in her area, says Lawrence, already have full practices. And since Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements for dental care are “not high,” finding a dentist who will see a patient covered by those programs can be tough.

Bite: “Part of what makes this so urgent for me,” says Lawrence, “is that every year at least two children in my practice under the age of five have two or more teeth extracted under general anesthesia.” She’s hoping the various efforts of her practice—and other initiatives like the one in Maine—will take a bite out of those numbers.

JENNIFER DURGIN

CLINICAL OBSERVATION

In this section, we highlight the human side of clinical academic medicine, putting a few questions to a physician at DMS-DHMC.

Margit Berman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Psychiatry

Berman, whose doctorate is in counseling and social psychology, is codirector of the Mood Disorders Service and also specializes in eating disorders. She joined the Dartmouth faculty in 2008.

How did you become interested in your field?

I went into psychology because I find people fascinating. My undergraduate degree was in English literature, so I like to think that I’ve had a chance to try and understand people through the lenses of both art and science. Psychiatry departments need psychologists because we offer expertise in tests, measurements, and other scientific methods to understand and improve human behavior.

What about you would surprise most people?

Anyone who looks at me can tell I’m no athlete, so maybe people would be surprised to learn that once in a while I like to try a physically adventurous sport. I’ve tried sea kayaking, rock climbing, dog sledding, and flying trapeze. I even went hang gliding—when I was four months pregnant! It was a lot of fun, but I’m sure your physician would suggest trying it at a less delicate time.



What’s your favorite nonwork activity?

Being with my six-year-old son, by far! We spend a lot

of time pretending to be lions, wolves, cheetahs—he likes big, carnivorous animals.

What three people would you like to have over for dinner?

If we’re talking about famous people, living or dead, then the playwright Tony Kushner, the poet Sharon Olds, and the food writer M.F.K.

Fisher. In addition to admiring all three as artists, I think the conversation would be positively electric. Really, though, I’d be happiest with my husband, my son, and my late grandfather. My grandfather was a wise and wonderful retired cardiologist who died when my son was just a year old, so my meals with all three were far too few and precious.

What is a talent you wish you had?

I wish I was skilled in working with my hands. I enjoy making art and crafts a great deal, but I wouldn’t mind having a lot more talent!

What quality do you most admire and most despise?

So many qualities are admirable, it’s a nearly impossible question. I admire skillfulness in virtually any endeavor, enthusiasm, equanimity, fairness. I do admire honesty and transparency, especially in leaders and people in positions of power. And I suppose its reverse—duplicity, particularly for self-interested or malicious ends—would be the quality I find most difficult to tolerate when I run across it.

What’s the funniest thing that has ever happened to you?

When I’m funny, unfortunately it usually isn’t intentional. I’m delighted that no one who is reading this ever witnessed the only remotely amusing things that have ever happened to me.

What advice would you offer to someone who is contemplating going into your field?

Lots of people want to be psychologists, but many of them don’t need to become a psychologist to do the kind of work they dream of doing. People who want to be therapists, for example, might do just as well getting a master’s degree in clinical social work, rather than spending six years on a doctorate in psychology. On the other hand, if you want to help people through scientific research, testing, or measurement, psychology is going to be perfect for you. So my advice is to clarify what you want out of a career in psychology, find people who are doing that, and ask *them* for advice. That’s probably good advice for getting into any career!

