

ADEA ROAD TO  
RESIDENCY SERIES

X

OFFICE OF CAREER  
& PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

updated 2024 FAQ

# PERIODONTICS RESIDENCY FAQ

*Special thanks to UCSF program director, periodontist residents, in particular Dr. Vincent Li, and D4s for generously taking the time to share their insights about the specialty, the UCSF Periodontology program, and the application process.*

Nayoon Kim, Class of 2026, ADEA Periodontology Lead

*What is periodontics?*

The field of periodontics is an evidence-based specialty within dentistry that focuses on treating the structures that surround and support teeth. Periodontists focus on treating periodontal disease, an inflammatory condition that affects the gums and bone. The scope of procedures performed by a periodontist includes osseous grafts, dental implants, guided bone & tissue regeneration, crown lengthening, and more.

*What do you like about periodontics?*

Periodontics is a very unique specialty of dentistry. Having a clear grasp of the biology and functionality of the periodontium not only allows us to help individuals who may otherwise lose their teeth due to periodontitis, but to also provide ways to restore teeth to patients who have lost them or who are in terminal dentition. Additionally, we are also one of the few professions that specializes in the regeneration of soft tissue and bone.

Finally, the aspect of patient care stands out as one of the primary reasons I chose periodontics. Unlike some other specialties where long-term follow-up with patients may not be necessary, treating patients with periodontitis typically involves establishing lifelong relationships built on trust and rapport.

*Dr. Vincent Li, 2nd year resident*

*What is the curriculum for periodontics like at UCSF?*

The 3-year UCSF Periodontics Program starts on July 1st with didactic, clinical, and research curriculum components.

- **Didactics:** Residents start off with didactics their first year, honing in on the biology of oral diseases. Residents describe the start of the program as a “bootcamp,” as they learn about the pathogenesis and treatment of periodontal disease. In addition, residents attend seminars and participate in literature reviews on a weekly to monthly basis.

- **Clinical:** Residents spend the majority of time in clinic seeing patients. From consultations to surgeries, residents gain strong clinical experience throughout their years at UCSF, managing comprehensive patient care and handling complex cases. Procedures include, but are not limited to: hard and soft tissue grafting, dental implants, guided regeneration surgeries, and even IV sedation techniques.
- **Research:** The UCSF Periodontics Program is accompanied by a Masters of Science (MS) degree. Each resident is expected to head a research project on their interest under the guidance of a faculty member and to complete a thesis and manuscript by the end of their program. Throughout the years, residents have time built into their school schedule to work on their research projects.

*How would you describe the balance between didactics, clinic, and research at UCSF?*

UCSF has a strong didactic program and our clinical judgment is rooted in research. However, we also have plenty of clinical hours to practice and employ what we learn. If each AM and PM is considered one session, we on average have three didactic sessions, eight clinical sessions, and one research session. If you're following along and thinking that the math doesn't work out, it's because we also have some early morning, lunch, and didactic sessions mixed into the schedule. Each year in residency is approximately the same amount of each session, with the key differences being an additional didactics session for the first year residents to complete their MS courses, and an additional research session for the third year residents.

*Dr. Vincent Li, 2nd year resident*

*When should applicants apply to periodontics residency?*

The match application opens in early May. As the specialty of periodontics participates in Phase I Early Match, applicants are encouraged to submit their application before the first program deadline. As such, applicants should start drafting their personal statement, crafting their resume, and asking for letters of recommendation before then.

For UCSF, applicants must also have passed the National Board Dental Examination (NBDE) part I & II or Integrated National Board Exam (INBDE), as well as hold a DDS or DMD degree by the start of the program.

*What constitutes a strong application?*

There are a few obvious things we look for on the application: strong didactics, research experience, shadowing and assisting experience, letters of recommendation, as well as a clear and concise personal statement. Applicants should be able to express an understanding of what the core values are of being a periodontist. There are many opportunities at UCSF to better your grasp of the field, such as assisting in PG perio, joining periodontics clubs, applying for a periodontics clerkship, and conducting research in periodontics. However, beyond what is written on paper, the strongest applicants are the ones who fit the culture of the residency. Consider reaching out for externships to learn more about individual programs.

Show genuine interest and be honest on your application!

*Dr. Vincent Li, 2nd year resident*

*How many letters of recommendation do I need?*

To apply to the UCSF Program of Periodontology, three letters of recommendation, in addition to a Dean's Letter, are required. These letters of recommendation can come from any mentor figure that the applicant confidently believes would represent them well - this can include clinical faculty, periodontal faculty, research advisors, and more. When requesting a recommendation, applicants should have their personal statement, resume, and transcript ready to provide. Students are advised to regularly update their CV throughout dental school.

*How did you choose between programs?*

There are many factors to weigh when choosing between all the different periodontal programs.

Consider internal features of the program itself: is the program didactically driven, clinically driven, or a good balance of both? What is the patient pool like - will you get enough experience with patients and procedures? Is interdisciplinary work collaborative or competitive - will you be working with other specialties or fighting for patient cases? How is the faculty support? What is the ratio of residents to attendings? What is the cost of the program? Does the personality and culture of the program fit yours? Will you get along with everyone for the next couple of years?

Then look into factors external to the program. Consider location. Ask yourself where you want to live for the next few years. Keep in mind residency is where you will develop deeper professional connections that could potentially help you secure a job if you decide to stay after graduating - think about where you want to work in the future.

Each person prioritizes these factors differently; it is up to the individual applicant to decide what they value the most. Finally, with the match system, do not choose a program based on where you *think* you will get in - do not try to predict the system. You never know which residency program you may end up truly loving, and which residency may decide to overlook potential "weaknesses" in your application and choose you simply because they believe that you would be a great fit.

*Dr. Vincent Li, 2nd year resident*