



**Dr. Jahnavi Rao**  
**2026 Orthodontic Faculty Development Fellowship Award**  
**Midwestern University College of Dental Medicine**

**1. Short Biography**

I am a full-time Assistant Professor at Midwestern University College of Dental Medicine in Downers Grove, Illinois, and a Diplomate of the American Board of Orthodontists. Since transitioning to a full-time academic role over the past three years, I have focused my efforts on advancing my understanding of orthodontic market dynamics, dental support organizations (DSOs), and gender distribution within the specialty. My academic and research pursuits are centered on generating meaningful, evidence-based insights that inform orthodontists about evolving practice models and career development pathways. Through teaching, research, and mentorship, I aim to contribute to the development of future orthodontists while also advancing the profession through scholarly work.

**2. Brief Description of the Project**

This project investigates the impact of Dental Support Organizations (DSOs) on orthodontic practice, with a specific focus on clinical autonomy, career growth, and job satisfaction among orthodontists. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how DSOs influence professional experiences and decision-making within the specialty.

The findings from this research will directly inform workforce planning, career pathway development, and educational strategies within orthodontics. By examining both quantitative trends and qualitative experiences, this project seeks to provide a nuanced perspective on one of the most rapidly evolving practice models in dentistry.

**3. Benefit to Orthodontic Education**

This project will contribute to orthodontic education by providing data-driven insights into contemporary practice environments that many graduates will encounter. As DSOs continue to expand, it is essential for orthodontic training programs to prepare residents and predoctoral students with a realistic understanding of these models. The results of this research will help educators integrate discussions on career pathways, professional autonomy, and practice management into curricula. Ultimately, this will better equip future orthodontists to make informed career decisions and adapt successfully to evolving practice landscapes.

**4. Importance of the Foundation to the Project**

The support of the AAO Foundation has been instrumental in advancing this project. The application process itself fostered valuable collaboration and mentorship opportunities, allowing me to engage with experts in the field whom I may not have otherwise approached. Foundation funding has provided a stable and critical platform to pursue meaningful research activities, build interdisciplinary collaborations, and gain exposure to resources essential for early academic career development. This support has significantly enhanced both the scope and quality of the project.

**5. Impact of Foundation Funding on Career Development**

The Foundation's support has had a profound impact on my career trajectory. It has enabled me to strategically develop a comprehensive and enriching academic pathway by supporting both research and professional growth initiatives. Funding will be utilized to pursue advanced training in orthodontic procedures, particularly in the management of interdisciplinary cases using aligner therapy. Additionally, I plan to engage in leadership development through mentorship opportunities within AAO and ADEA programs, as well as formal leadership training courses. These experiences will strengthen my role as an educator, clinician, and researcher, while preparing me for future academic and administrative leadership positions. The Foundation's investment has not only supported my current work but has also laid the groundwork for sustained contributions to orthodontic education and the profession.