

Career Management



Beyond the chair: Exploring diverse dental careers

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INTRODUCTION

Choosing a profession in the field of oral health care opens up a vast array of career opportunities and pathways. The field offers many options to suit an individual’s aspirations and interests, whether they are related to clinical practice or community-oriented work, including in academia, non-profits and governmental organizations. With ongoing advancements in technology, treatment methods and research, the domain of oral health care continues to evolve, providing an exciting and dynamic environment for professionals in the field.

Pursuing a career path within oral health care can come with many challenges such as continuously updating skills, managing patient expectations, and staying up to date with industry regulations. Therefore, it is crucial to embrace lifelong learning by seizing growth opportunities, fostering connections through networking and actively sharing knowledge. By doing so, professionals can remain relevant in their field and provide the best possible care for their patients.

Choosing a career path can be a daunting task, especially for young students who are entering the workforce for the first time. FDI’s Career Management project aims to help dental students and professionals in oral health care to explore the different career pathways and opportunities available within dentistry. It emphasizes the importance of aligning one’s aspirations with the chosen line of work and reminds seasoned professionals that it’s never too late to consider new directions.

This brochure shares real-life experiences with the aim of motivating professionals in oral health care to embrace new opportunities, according to what resonates with them on an individual basis. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance for long-term career satisfaction and personal well-being. Recognizing the genuine risk of burnout in dentistry, given its demanding nature, the project encourages practitioners to prioritize self-care, establish boundaries, and dedicate time to rejuvenating activities, such as engaging in hobbies, regular exercise, and quality time spent with loved ones.



The interviews contained in this brochure were submitted by external parties and have been edited according to FDI’s editorial guidelines. The views expressed in these interviews are those of the original authors and do not represent the opinions or views of the FDI World Dental Federation.

ACADEMIA AND RESEARCH

ASST. PROFESSOR ANUBHUTI SHUKLA

“ *For those embarking on a career in oral health, my advice is to begin by identifying your passion and purpose within the field.* ”



Anubhuti Shukla BDS, MHA Assistant Professor

Diplomate, American Board of Dental Public Health Director,
Community Based Dental Education Indiana University School of Dentistry

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

I would describe myself as a Public Health dentist focused towards improving oral health access for some of the most vulnerable population groups in United States, including special needs population, gender minorities, individuals residing in rural underserved locations as well as racial and ethnic minorities. I started off as a general dental practitioner wanting to make the smiles of my patients perfect, but my career trajectory has moved

to a completely different paradigm when I moved to United States. I graduated from India with a Bachelor's in Dental Surgery and moved to United States to further train in the disciplines of Special Needs Dentistry and Dental Public Health. I have worked as a clinician, an educator, researcher as well as an advocate for oral health equity. In my current role, as the Director of Community-Based Dental Education (CBDE) at Indiana University School of Dentistry (IUSD), I've been entrusted with a role that allows me to unleash my creativity, pursue my passion, address areas of improvement, and leverage my strengths. Over the past three years, my tenure in this capacity has been transformative, particularly in addressing the substantial disparities in access to dental care among underserved populations in the state of Indiana.

What motivated you to pursue a career in oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that shaped your decision?

My career has been defined by a relentless pursuit of excellence in service, education, and research. I'm a lifelong learner. I realized early on in my career, there were larger system-based issues in oral healthcare delivery models that affected patients' oral health condition. One of the pivotal moments that shaped my career path was when I joined the General Practice Residency Program at University of Texas (UT), Houston. In this role, I had the privilege of offering dental services to patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities and those with significant comorbidities. This experience exposed me to a segment of population that often faces significant barriers to accessing oral healthcare. It was a deeply rewarding experience and it reinforced my commitment to serving the vulnerable and underserved communities.

However, the turning point in my career came when I completed a Dental Public Health residency programme at Harvard University School of Dental Medicine. This experience unveiled to me, the stark reality of limited access to oral health services for millions of Americans. I saw firsthand the pressing need for evidence-informed preventive care and recognized the importance of addressing oral health disparities in United States. I intend to continue to focus on expanding and strengthening my efforts to increase access to oral health services for the vulnerable, conducting impactful research, and enhancing my reputation as a Dental Public Health advocate.

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of? What made it meaningful or memorable?

One of the career highlights that I take immense pride in is my role as a Dental Public Health Consultant at the Dubai Health Authority from 2018 to 2019. As a recent graduate in dental public health, this opportunity was a truly overwhelming experience for me. During this period, I had the extraordinary opportunity to engage in international-level challenges that broadened my horizons and tested my skills. A particularly meaningful and memorable experience during this period was my involvement in the development of a comprehensive ten-year oral health strategy named "Dentoral" for United Arab Emirates. This endeavour was a collaborative effort where I worked closely with healthcare teams to enhance the quality of oral health services and overall outcomes. It provided me with profound insights into the realm of global public health principles and the intricacies of crafting long-term strategies to advance oral health at the national level. The significance of this achievement lies in its far-reaching impact on public health and the invaluable knowledge I gained from this endeavour.

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career journey?

For those embarking on a career in oral health, my advice is to begin by identifying your passion and purpose within the field. Whether it's clinical practice, research, education, or administration that excites you, let that passion be your guiding force. Embrace lifelong learning, staying current with evolving technologies and research. If you're entering clinical practice, seek diverse experiences to enhance your skills and gain exposure to different aspects of oral health. Even in clinical roles, consider integrating a public health perspective, advocating for preventive care and equitable access to dental services. Building a robust professional network, involving yourself in research and scholarship, and seeking mentorship are vital steps to a successful and lasting career. Engaging in advocacy, understanding the impact of policies on oral health, and actively participating in community outreach will round out your career. Maintain a healthy work-life balance, stay adaptable in the face of change, and remember to pass on your knowledge and experience to the next generation of oral health professionals. Your journey in oral health is dynamic, and these principles will help you make a meaningful impact on individuals and communities.



DR JAGJIT SINGH DHALIWAL

“ *My fascination with Dentistry started at a very early age.* ”



Dr Jagjit Singh Dhaliwal

MDS (Karnatak), MPhil (Newcastle), PhD (McGill), FDS RCPS (Glasg)

Associate Professor-Dentistry PAPRSB Institute of Health Sciences
Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

I completed my BDS in 1994 and immediately took the specialty training in Periodontics in India, I joined a government hospital for three years and went on to do a one year M.Phil. course in the UK, following that I came back to India, started working as visiting consultant in a multispeciality hospital and took a part-time teaching role. I went on to do PhD in Canada and after the completion I joined as full time academic in University Brunei Darussalam and have been working since the last seven years.

What motivated you to pursue a career in oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that shaped your decision?

My fascination with Dentistry started at a very early age. As a child, I had to go to a dentist for the regular dental check-ups. His motivation and tender handling of me as a child patient inspired me to choose dentistry as a future profession. During school, I was attracted towards science subjects and opted for Biology as my majors. Throughout my middle and high school. I worked hard to make this dream a reality. In 1989, I was able to gain admission to one of the best dental schools in India, the KLES's Institute of Dental Sciences, Belgaum for a five-year Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme, which I finished in 1994. During my time at the dental school, I developed a liking for Periodontology. In order to gain further exposure in the field, I took up a one-year internship in Periodontology at the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, a premier health institute of the country. At the PGIMER, I shadowed the Oral Surgeon for various surgical procedures. In 1995, I was accepted into a highly sought after position for a three-year full time postdoctoral program in Periodontology (MDS) at KLES's Dental College, Belgaum.

What specific skills or qualities do you believe are essential for success in the field of oral health?

I think the following qualities are essential to be a good oral healthcare provider –good communication skills, professionalism, one has to be a lifelong learner, empathetic, honest, have leadership skills, be industrious, must have ability to work under pressure, problem solving skills, stress management skills, should have skills in artwork/sculpting.

Can you recall any particular patient cases or experiences that have had a profound impact on your career or personal growth?

I had a patient who asked me how many surgical procedures I have done during my junior residency and that prompted me to do my specialty training in Periodontics.

DR MOTOFUMI SOGO

“ *I had chosen to study ‘dentistry’ at university because I was born into a family of dentists with my grandfather and father both being dentists.* ”



Dr Motofumi Sogo, D.D.S., Ph.D., Japan

In this interview, Dr Motofumi Sogo goes over his career trajectory in the field of oral health, encompassing academia, entrepreneurship and continued contributions to the dental community.

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

My career path in the field of oral health consists of four phases since my graduation from the School of Dentistry at Osaka University.

Phase 1 (1st - 18th year) – My first university career

During this phase, I embarked on my first university career, which began at the Department of Removable Prosthodontics within Osaka University Dental Hospital. As I progressed, I was transferred to the Division of Interdisciplinary Dentistry at the same Dental Hospital.

Phase 2 (15th – 30th year) – Founding a venture company and resigning from the university

In this phase, I ventured in the world of entrepreneurship by founding a venture company that originated from the School of Dentistry at Osaka University. During my career's 18th year, I resigned from my permanent teaching position at the School of Dentistry, Osaka University.

Phase 3 (30th – 35th year) – My second university career

I then transitioned into my second university career when I was appointed as the Professor at the Office of Strategic Innovative Dentistry at the Osaka University Graduate School of Dentistry.

Phase 4 (35th – present) – My third university career

In the current phase of my career, I hold the position of the Specially-appointed Professor and invited professor at the office of Strategic Innovative Dentistry, Osaka University Graduate School of Dentistry, and I also serve as the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) of my business.

What motivated you to pursue a career in oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that shaped your decision?

Although it might not be so unusual, I had chosen to study ‘dentistry’ at university because I was born into a family of dentists with my grandfather and father both being dentists. **On the other hand, what motivated me to establish a venture company and become an entrepreneur was “the historical background of the times”.** In Japan at that time, the first Koizumi Cabinet was formed in 2001, and along with the “Intellectual Property Outlines (2002)”, “Incorporation of National Universities as Independent Administrative Institutions

(2004),” and “The Plan for 1,000 Academic Startups (2001)” was also launched. Then, I decided to start my own venture business, believing that “Japanese universities should follow the good examples of American universities, especially like Stanford University which continues to produce successful venture business entrepreneurs in the world” and strongly hoped to become a new role model among the university faculty members. My decision was further influenced by the support I found at work. While my parents would have opposed my decision if they were alive, my bosses were extremely supportive of my ideas and encouraged my decision to become an entrepreneur.

What specific skills or qualities do you believe are essential for success in the field of oral health?

Since I believe I still have a long way towards success, I prefer to let my actions speak for themselves, but I also believe that success doesn't necessarily require any special skills or qualifications. If I were to offer advice, I would suggest that the below two points are important.

- Having an inquisitive mind and developing a greater interest in the broad field, not limited to oral health.
- Picturing the image of your future success.



Can you recall any particular patient cases or experiences that have had a profound impact on your career or personal growth?

There are two particular experiences from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of my career that had a profound impact on me.

In Phase 1, I was deeply marked by my work with edentulous patients. This experience compelled me to stay in the Department of Removable Prosthodontics and Gerodontology. Witnessing the transformation in these patients, who regained the ability to chew even without a single tooth, thanks to the use of a high-quality denture that formed a strong bond with the oral mucosa using negative pressure, made me strongly desire to become a master of dentures, known as “Takumi” in Japanese.

In Phase 2, it was encounters with the implant treatment patients that left a mark on me. At that time, the only way to diagnose the case of needing implants was by orthopantomography. I recall when I encountered CT, a device that can show the three-dimensional form of the jawbone and the conditions of the bone in actual size, it motivated me to aim for safe and reliable implant treatment.

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career?

I would like to give two pieces of advice to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career journey.

The first one is to apply logical thinking to all aspects of your work. There are still a lot of empirical sides to clinical dentistry, and I feel it's easy to place blind trust in charismatic figures. However, it's crucial to critically evaluate information and ensure that it aligns with sound reasoning.

My second advice is to look for your own interests and deepen your knowledge and skills in those areas. And most importantly, seek out your dream. In this context, I would like to share two of my favorite quotes on the subject of “dream” from two experts whose family names were coincidentally the same as ‘Yoshida’.

The first quote is “Shoin Yoshida” a samurai and famous philosopher in the late Edo period, who said, **“There is no success for those without dreams”**.

*No Ideal for those without dreams,
No plan for those without ideals,
No execution for those without planning,
No success for those without execution.
Therefore, no success for those without dreams.*

The second one is the quote from my mentor in entrepreneurship, “Masaki Yoshida”. Shoin Yoshida’s words convey the importance of dreams, while this quote is for those who are still seeking a dream, titled **“To everyone who does not have a dream”**.

*If you do not have a dream, save money.
If you do not have a dream, go travel.
If you do not have a dream, stay near people who have a dream.
If you do not have a dream, study hard.
If you do not have a dream, make a lot of friends.*

ASST. PROFESSOR PRIYANKA GUDSOORKAR

“ *Seeing her smile transformed after we alleviated her pain motivates me whenever I face challenges in this work.* ”



Priyanka Gudsoorkar

Assistant Professor, Global Health Concentration Director, University of Cincinnati; Co-founder, Solidarity Dental Foundation

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

My career path in oral health has focused on education, research, and clinical care in underserved global contexts. After earning my dental degree in India, I gained clinical experience providing dental care to vulnerable populations in India. I then transitioned into dental education; teaching courses focused on global/oral health and mentoring students. I earned an MPH and MBA focused on global health to further develop my expertise. **My research has centered on assessing oral health status, knowledge, behaviours, and quality of life in disadvantaged communities in India, Tanzania, Ecuador, and beyond.** I have volunteered with organizations like the Global Health Brigade, Village Life Outreach Project, and Solidarity Dental Foundation to lead oral health projects internationally.

Currently, I am an Assistant Professor developing a curriculum in global health and leading research/volunteer efforts to improve oral health access and outcomes globally.

Can you recall any particular patient cases or experiences that have had a profound impact on your career or personal growth?

Yes, I can recall some very meaningful experiences from my time providing dental care in underserved communities in Tanzania and Ecuador that truly impacted my career and personal growth.

In Tanzania, I vividly remember a teenage boy who walked 10 miles barefoot just to have his severely infected tooth extracted. The lack of access to care and his determination to end his pain brought the dire need and oral health disparities to life for me. Interacting with the teenager reinforced my commitment to serving vulnerable populations.

Another case that sticks with me is, a 6-year-old girl from a rural village in Ecuador. She had rampant tooth decay but through our team's mobile dental clinic, we were able to provide her with extractions, restorative care, and education. Seeing her smile transformed after we alleviated her pain motivates me whenever I face challenges in this work.

Beyond individual patients, facilitating oral health workshops for communities impact me greatly. In Tanzania and Ecuador both, the people's immense gratitude and eagerness to learn ways to care for their oral health despite having little resources humbles me. Witnessing their hope inspires me daily.

Overall, my experiences providing care abroad have shown me the remarkable impact even basic oral healthcare can have on underserved populations when delivered with compassion. I'm dedicated to expanding access to care globally so more people can enjoy the dramatic improvement in quality of life that good oral health allows.

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career journey?

- **Seek out mentors** - Having an experienced mentor to provide guidance, feedback, and support as you gain experience is invaluable. Mentors can share wisdom, connect you to opportunities, and help you avoid pitfalls.
- **Continuously learn** - Commit to being a lifelong learner. Attend conferences, workshops, and webinars, and engage in self-study. Staying abreast of emerging techniques, technologies, research, and best practices is key to providing excellent patient care.
- **Develop strong communication skills** - Improve your ability to listen attentively, speak clearly, write effectively, and interact positively with diverse patients and professionals. Good communication builds your credibility.
- **Be patient-centered** - Keep the patient's best interests at the core of what you do. When making recommendations, prioritize understanding your patients' needs, values, and preferences. Patient-centered care leads to better outcomes.
- **Collaborate and network** - Build relationships within and outside your organization. Collaboration enhances expertise, while networking opens doors to career opportunities. Surround yourself with supportive colleagues.
- **Manage stress** - Develop healthy coping strategies to manage the inevitable stresses of this demanding profession. Self-care helps avoid burnout so you can have a long, fulfilling career.
- **Remain ethical** - Uphold the highest ethical standards, even when it's difficult. Ethics and integrity establish trust with patients and colleagues.
- **Be open-minded** - Maintain curiosity. Approaching your career with an openness to learn new perspectives and ways of doing things will allow you to improve continuously.



DR TAMANNA TIWARI

“ You and your work are vital in every aspect of oral health!



Dr Tamanna Tiwari

Dr Tamanna Tiwari is an Associate Professor in the Department of Community Dentistry and Population Health and the Associate Director for the Center for Oral Disease Prevention and Population Health Research at the University of Colorado, School of Dental Medicine.

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

My path in the field of oral health started when I entered dental school to become a dentist in 2000. I completed my Bachelors in Dental Surgery (BDS) and then went on to complete a Masters in Endodontics in India. Later, I completed a Master's in Global Public Health at New York University.

I had a dental office in New Delhi and practiced for a few years, and then I started to yearn for more, a higher impact of my work and working at the population level. I quickly realized that I needed to educate myself in this area further to have that impact. My husband and I sold the practice in Delhi and moved to New York, where I completed a Master's in Global Public Health.

We moved to Colorado, and I started my career in population oral health – at the Center for Native Oral Health Research, University of Colorado – the only center that worked to reduce oral health inequities in American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.

I learned about how social, behavioural, and psychosocial factors impacted oral health. I worked with a team of researchers that implemented clinical trials in behavioural change in oral health and studied Motivational Interviewing, the other behavioural change mechanisms.

That was the start of my career in behavioural change research in oral health. I went on to work with Hispanic communities, African immigrants and several other populations using similar research approaches in health behaviours on oral health, the relationship between social, environmental, and cultural factors and health disparities, and trust between patients and dental providers. I am funded by the National Institute of Health, Colgate, CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, and several other foundations. Recently, I have added Medical- Dental integration and person-centered care to my work portfolio, educating dental educators and dental students in this area. In addition, I am using big data to understand how social determinants of health and area- level factors impact the risk for oral diseases and access to care. I was awarded the 2023 American Dental Association Evidence-Based Dentistry Mid-Career Faculty Award for my research.

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of? What made it meaningful or memorable?

One of the things that I am proud of is getting funded for by the National Institute of Health - National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research for my research that evaluates protective factors in early childhood caries.

Studying protective factors is not as common as studying risk factors, and getting funded for such research is even more difficult. This research enables us to understand why some children who belong to high-risk groups may not develop dental caries and how we can use these identified protective factors to develop interventions. Through this research, I was able to work with many parents, children, and communities and get an immersive experience to better understand their life circumstances and what leads to being caries-free or developing caries. I am able to share this work with the dental students, and it makes it more meaningful – as they can use this research in their future dental practice.

How do you stay updated with the latest advancements, research, and techniques in the field of oral health?

I am an active member of dental research and public health organizations, and that helps keep me updated on the latest advances in the field. I am the current president of the Behavioural Epidemiologic Health Services Research Group within the International Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research (IADR). Also, I am a reviewer for over a dozen peer-reviewed journals, and this provides an opportunity to review new research in the field of oral health, behaviour change, and social determinants of oral health.

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career journey?

Be open to change, connect with experts outside your field who can influence/expand your perspectives, and be optimistic about the future. This is my advice for future oral health providers, educators, and researchers.

What advice would give to members of the dental team considering a career change?

Oral health is a vast field, and if you are moving from the surgical or clinical part of oral health practice to education, research, administration, or policy – consider that an expansion of your work. All these components are critical for the success of the field and the health of the population. You and your work are vital in every aspect of oral health!



DIRECT CLINICAL CARE

DR DAISY MASIS

“ *Never forget your values as a human being and your essence.* ”



Dr Daisy Masis

Pediatric Dentist and dental specialties coordinator in the cleft lip and palate programme, Asociación Pro-Niños Quemados de Nicaragua (APROQUEN), Nicaragua, Smile Train member.

What motivated you to pursue a career in oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that shaped your decision?

My decision to pursue a career in oral health stems from a profound commitment to serving others and improving individuals' quality of life. Early on, I was profoundly influenced

by my volunteering experience with children from low-income families dealing with cleft lip and palate and burn injuries. It was during this time that I recognized the transformative impact oral health could have on the well-being and self-esteem of these kids. **I believe every child deserves access to comprehensive oral care; everyone does.** Embracing healthcare can be a wonderful path toward achieving justice. This realization fueled my passion for contributing to a society where individuals can thrive holistically.

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of? What made it meaningful or memorable?

My commitment to community service within my country's cleft lip and palate programme, APROQUEN, along with being a Smile Train partner, serves as a driving force in my career. This commitment leads me to actively engage in outreach programmes, educational initiatives, and community-based healthcare projects. It empowers me to make a positive impact by sharing knowledge on oral hygiene, delivering essential dental care, and working in pre-surgical orthopedics. I aim to inspire many young professionals to take on this beautiful journey through professional and humanitarian exchanges, and to empower the cleft community to manage their oral health, integrate into society, and improve their overall quality of life, making this work memorable.

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career journey?

My advice to professionals in the field would be to adopt a holistic approach that extends beyond clinical practice. This involves considering patients' well-being and their family context, background, health experience, culture, and beliefs.

In addition, building strategic partnerships with reputable organizations, diversifying skills through interdisciplinary knowledge, and actively engaging in community-based projects are also crucial. Commitment to lifelong learning, effective communication, and cultivating empathy and compassion further enhance one's ability to impact patient experiences and contribute meaningfully to the community's well-being.

I would also advise them to seek mentorship from experienced professionals. Setting aspirational goals beyond clinical practice rounds out a comprehensive strategy for a successful and impactful career journey in oral health.

My final piece of advice would be to never forget your values as a human being and your essence.

What specific skills or qualities are essential for success in oral health?

Success in oral health requires a multifaceted approach that combines technical proficiency, interpersonal skills, empathy, professionalism, and a commitment to continuous learning. This involves maintaining a solid foundation in dental knowledge, staying updated on technological advancements, and cultivating genuine concern for patients' well-being. **Compassionate care is crucial for building lasting patient-dentist relationships, and upholding high ethical standards is fundamental in healthcare.** Additionally, collaborative teamwork enhances the overall approach to patient care, making adaptability and staying informed essential components of success in the dynamic field of oral health.



DR CHARLOTTE WAITE

“ *There will be many people who you meet along the way that will shape your career and be assured that you will find your way.* ”



Dr Charlotte Waite

Director BDA Scotland, British Dental Association

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

I graduated from the University of Dundee in 2001. I completed General Professional Training in the east of Scotland, which included a year working in general dental practice completing vocational training, six months in the community dental service (CDS) and six months working in a restorative department of a dental school. Following this, I worked in rural and remote areas of Australia as a locum dentist for a year.

On returning to the UK, after a brief time working in dental practice, I began a 20-year career in the community dental service in England.

The Community Dental Service (CDS) provide oral healthcare for some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Those who are referred to CDS are unable to receive routine dental care in high street dental practices. CDS patients commonly include adults and children with complex or additional needs, often including those who require special care dentistry or paediatric dentistry.

The approach taken to manage the oral healthcare needs of this group of patients, requires a holistic integrated approach, working across dentistry, medicine and social care. Care can be delivered across various settings, including primary and secondary care, residential or care homes, patients' own homes or secure environments. Treatment is not limited to local anaesthetic; it may also include sedation or general anaesthetic when necessary. It was this variation in patient needs and treatment modalities, that I found particularly attractive. No two days are ever the same.

I developed an interest in the barriers to care which are often faced by this group of patients and the complexities of the National Health Service (NHS) delivery within the salaried dental services. This is when I made the decision to stand for election and get involved with British Dental Association (BDA) committee work. For 15 years I was involved with BDA as an elected representative on various committees, eventually holding the position as Vice Chair and Chair of the BDA England Committee Dental Services Committee.

In 2022, I became BDA Scotland National Director. A role which would see me stepping away from clinical work but providing a fantastic opportunity to focus on all aspects of dentistry in Scotland, including supporting negotiations on dental pay, terms and conditions with Scottish Government, and advocating for dentists and our patients.

What motivated you to pursue a career in oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that shaped your decision?

As a child, unfortunately, I experienced dental trauma. Having needed dental treatment in primary and secondary care over a number of years, I had the opportunity to listen to dental students being taught about various aspects of my dental treatment and about my care. This is when I began to think that I would like to study dentistry.

It seemed like a career which would not only provide an opportunity to work as a team, to take a hands-on surgical approach but also one which would involve lots of problem solving.

As my career progressed and I continued to get involved with the BDA at a local and national level. **It became clear that I had a real passion for dental politics. I wanted to advocate for the profession and try to influence decision makers, whilst getting more involved with the development of dental policy at a more national level.**

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career journey?

As you start your career journey, you may already have a plan mapped out but I would encourage you to keep an open mind. We are often told to have a five or ten year plan and whilst it is positive to be driven and have aspirations, I think it's important to embrace opportunities as they arise and take a flexible approach to career planning. I believe that the direction your career takes will be impacted by those who you meet along the way. Enjoy these encounters, ask questions, consider different opinions and grab opportunities as they arise. This will help you to find your way. Don't be worried if your career path isn't obvious to start with. Much is said about having mentors, and whilst this can be as part of a formal arrangement, the colleagues and peers you work with, will often provide great support, advice and encouragement. My career path was definitely influenced by a number of key individuals. Take your time and remember that there is no ideal path but there will be many people who you meet along the way that will shape your career and be assured that you will find your way.



DR JEFF SHERER

“ *When I opened my first dental practice, it was a very proud moment.* ”



Dr Jeff Sherer

Clinical Director, The Dental Design Studio

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

I qualified as a dentist from Leeds (UK) in 2000 having emigrated from USA as a child.

I have completed post-graduate courses in sedation and dental implants. I started in 2004 a dental practice and now have a group of 20 dental practices which I run! I have been a dental mentor and contributed to a number of dental articles and podcasts in the UK.

What motivated you to pursue a career in oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that shaped your decision?

I was very nervous of the dentist as a child and remember running out of the dentist practice when they suggested I would need to have some teeth removed to create space. Thankfully my own dentist was very caring and made me feel comfortable with having the treatment. I did eventually have my orthodontic treatment and the result was great. It inspired me to do a career that would allow me to help people.

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of? What made it meaningful or memorable?

When I opened my first dental practice, it was a very proud moment for me. I always wanted to have my own practice so I could deliver dentistry in the way I felt was best. It taught it also about running a small business. It was very satisfying to see it grow from one surgery to five surgeries over the years.

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career journey?

There is no substitute to hard work and constantly improving your clinical skills. Keep focused and looking after your patients to the best of your ability.

What advice would give to members of the dental team considering a career change?

Dentistry is an amazing career, of course it is difficult sometimes and there are ups and downs, but it is a career where you can really help people.



HEALTHCARE ADMINISTRATION

DR DANA SEITENOVNA OSPANOVA

“ In any profession, knowledge is necessary. Experience comes later.



Dr Dana Seitenovna Ospanova

President of the Kazakhstan Stomatological Association

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

I graduated from the Alma-Ata State Medical Institute in 1983. Where I embarked on my professional journey with an internship in the maxillofacial surgery department of the Alma-Ata Regional Hospital, after which I started working as a general dentist in a rural hospital. Afterwards, I continued my career trajectory in a city polyclinic, where I worked as a dentist and demonstrated exceptional organizational skills. Within two years, my dedication led to my appointment as the head of the dental department. I was then appointed as Deputy Chief Physician and later as Chief Physician of the Dental Polyclinic in Almaty.

In 1997, I decided to establish my own private dental practice “Orbita-Dent”, aiming to generate employment opportunities for my fellow dentists. Since this I have acquired a number of private clinics including the “Aksai” clinic, “Versailles” and “Daris” in Almaty, and five of the largest dental clinics in the capital of Kazakhstan - the Astana city.

In 2004, I received my scientific degree as a Candidate of Medical Sciences. My academic journey continues as an Assistant Professor of the Department of Dentistry and Maxillofacial Surgery at the Astana Medical University. In 2017, I was honoured when the dental community of Kazakhstan elected me as the President- Elect of Kazakhstan Stomatological Association (KSA) and since 2019 I have been the President of KSA.

I also currently own a company comprising of nine large dental clinics located across Almaty and Astana, with more than 50 dental chairs in Almaty city and 60 dental chairs in Astana city. The clinics stand out for their uniqueness and high-tech nature, equipped with the latest modern dental equipment and materials. This cutting-edge setup enables the introduction of highly effective and innovative technologies. The clinics’ experts continually share their expertise through active engagement in various dental congresses, conferences and seminars. Notably, the company prioritizes providing high-quality and accessible care to a wide demographic. One clinic in the capital of Kazakhstan operates round-the-clock for the patients’ convenience.

I consider myself a talented entrepreneur and academic, I am a dedicated community leader. The clinics have advisory, organizational and methodological centres, offering dental professionals and students practical trainings. With my rich management experience and knowledge of the profession, I consistently meet state mandates for providing dental care to vulnerable populations. I am proud to actively engage with communities through collaboration with the Social Health Insurance Fund.

Beyond my professional roles, I am delighted to also support charitable causes by sponsoring talented young students’ education in medical universities of Astana and Almaty. On a regular basis I provide financial assistance to orphanages located in Almaty. I have been honoured to receive prestigious awards and recognition, including honours from the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Health, the Almaty City Health Department, and the KSA.

What motivated you to pursue a career in oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that shaped your decision?

In my family there were no doctors and I never thought about dentistry, but I always dreamed of being a doctor. The decision to choose the Dentistry among other fields of Medicine came spontaneously.

What specific skills or qualities do you believe are essential for success in the field of oral health?

In any profession, knowledge is necessary. Experience comes later. I always set myself goals and objectives, went to them persistently, wanted to be useful in my profession. I always share my experience with my colleagues.

Can you recall any particular patient cases or experiences that have had a profound impact on your career or personal growth?

My career development was influenced by my mentor and teacher, Muslimbai Dairbekov. He is older and more experienced, so a lot of people used to listen to him. He taught me how to manage business processes in dentistry and he told me: “There are a lot of doctors but no managers, no one trains them, but you will succeed in dentistry management!”



INDUSTRY AND INNOVATION

DRA. MARÍA IGNACIA VIAL

“ *As health professionals we must understand the intrinsic relationship that exists between people’s health and the health of the environment.* ”



Dra. María Ignacia Vial

Integrative Dental surgeon, Universidad del Desarrollo, Chile. Diplomat in orthodontics and interceptive and preventive orthopedics, Universidad Mayor, Chile. CEO and founder Ceromed.

Winner of the FDI Sustainability award 2023.

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

I graduated from university in 2013 and headed to Sydney, Australia, to experience the work and holiday visa. I spent one year working and traveling to Australia and Southeast Asia. Then, upon my return to Chile, I completed an internship at the Dr Luis Calvo Mackenna Hospital, the most important pediatric hospital in Chile, where I had rotations between maxillofacial surgery, pediatric dentistry and orthodontics. Then I completed the diplomat in interceptive orthodontics and orthopedics in children where I also worked as an assistant teacher for two years. I took various courses related to temporomandibular disorders, occlusion and oral rehabilitation until I arrived at a training course in anthroposophical dentistry and realized that my line was integrative dentistry. I dedicated my studies to complementary therapies such as aromatherapy, healthy habits, craniofacial massage, neural therapy and today I am studying biological dentistry.

In 2018, I founded Ceromed, a company dedicated to the management of non-hazardous waste in the medical area in order to reduce the amount of garbage generated after caring for patients. The service seeks to treat the garbage problem from its origin, recovering non-hazardous waste and thus recycling the plastic, paper and glass generated. We also seek to replace single-use supplies with supplies that can be reused, such as stainless steel that can be sterilized and reused. We encourage the use of environmentally friendly materials and inputs such as the use of wooden brushes and compostable bibs, among others.

We aim to cultivate environmental education in the workplace, helping dentists and dental teams contribute to the care of the environment and people.

For me, winning the dental sustainability award given by FDI was a great honour and moment of pride since it reinforced my ideals and desire to contribute in some way to the planet from my workplace and it motivates me to continue working on this.

What specific skills or qualities do you believe are essential for success in the field of oral health?

I believe that among the most important skills or qualities that one should have in the field of oral health is empathy with the patient, responsibility and professional ethics with our patients since we have the immense responsibility of oral and general healthcare, where we must put ourselves in the place of our patients and do our best to restore their oral and general health. Seeing them as complex beings where oral health is often related to other general pathologies and it is necessary to work with a multidisciplinary team.

What specific skills or qualities do you believe are essential for success in the field of oral health?

In any profession, knowledge is necessary. Experience comes later. I always set myself goals and objectives, went to them persistently, wanted to be useful in my profession. I always share my experience with my colleagues.

In your opinion, what are the current challenges or issues facing oral health professionals in today’s healthcare landscape?

For me, the biggest problem that dentists and dental teams face in the current health landscape is the amount of single-use waste that is generated by using disposable personal protective equipment and thus helping to avoid the spread of the different viruses that have attacked us in the last few years. As described by the World Health Organization in the 2022 report, a significant concern today is the tons of plastic that was discarded during the pandemic. This issue will pose a big public health challenge, potentially outweighing the effects of COVID-19. **As health professionals we must understand the intrinsic relationship that exists between people’s health and the health of the environment, which is why today for those of us who work in the health sector it is a great challenge to reduce and replace inputs and materials that we use, so that they do not end up contaminating our land, water and air.**

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career journey?

I would advise you not to think that dentistry is just seeing oral pathologies because it is much more than that. It is one of the most complete careers where science, technology, art, psychology, aesthetics, among others, are combined, giving many job alternatives.

I would also advise seeing the patient in a comprehensive way from the beginning, worrying not only about what happens in their mouth but also studying what happens in their body in general, how they eat, how they sleep, what their habits are, and family and psychological environment.



DR SHREYA SHAH

“ *While growing up in India, we didn't have access to oral health education, and oral health was neglected, most of my old family members were wearing dentures due to neglect in periodontal health which led me to opt for a career in oral health.* ”



Dr Shreya Shah

BDS, M.S. in Dental Biomaterials from UAB (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

I am Dr Shreya Shah, I have Complete BDS (Bachelor in Dental Surgery) in 2008 and completed M.S. in Dentistry with a Major in Biomaterials in 2011. I was hired as a Research Associate by Glidewell Laboratories in 2012. Since then I have been a high-performing and experienced Clinical Research Manager, Project Manager, and researcher in the Dental medical device industry. I am highly motivated and self-driven with a strong 11-year background working in the Research and Development department. Supporting in writing of both Clinical and non-clinical protocols for studies, conducting literature searches along with authoring CERLR (Clinical Evaluations Reports and Literature Review) for various medical devices using various research platforms for conducting research. I also manage sponsor-initiated Clinical studies and act as a liaison between the company and clinical investigators along with interacting with KOLs. Along with this,

I also have a background in designing clinical and non-clinical studies. I have publications records for writing white papers, scientific articles, and abstract and poster publications. I lead the collaboration with universities for research projects funded by the company. **As a clinical research manager and project manager, I collaborate and interact with regulatory, legal, marketing, engineering, software team and purchasing departments regularly.** As a part of my recent achievement, I was able to successfully apply and get Medicare approval for two dental sleep appliances. I think with my skills I was able to find opportunities and able to contribute to dental Industry.

The Community Dental Service (CDS) provide oral healthcare for some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Those who are referred to CDS are unable to receive routine dental care in high street dental practices. CDS patients commonly include adults and children with complex or additional needs, often including those who require special care dentistry or paediatric dentistry.

The approach taken to manage the oral healthcare needs of this group of patients, requires a holistic integrated approach, working across dentistry, medicine and social care. Care can be delivered across various settings, including primary and secondary care, residential or care homes, patients' own homes or secure environments. Treatment is not limited to local anaesthetic; it may also include sedation or general anaesthetic when necessary. It was this variation in patient needs and treatment modalities, that I found particularly attractive. No two days are ever the same.

I developed an interest in the barriers to care which are often faced by this group of patients and the complexities of the National Health Service (NHS) delivery within the salaried dental services. This is when I made the decision to stand for election and get involved with British Dental Association (BDA) committee work. For 15 years I was involved with BDA as an elected representative on various committees, eventually holding the position as Vice Chair and Chair of the BDA England Committee Dental Services Committee.

In 2022, I became BDA Scotland National Director. A role which would see me stepping away from clinical work but providing a fantastic opportunity to focus on all aspects of dentistry in Scotland, including supporting negotiations on dental pay, terms and conditions with Scottish Government, and advocating for dentists and our patients.

What specific skills or qualities do you believe are essential for success in the field of oral health?

The skills that are essential for success in the oral health industry are taking the initiative to learn and understand the current technology, new biomaterials, and dental devices being constantly introduced in the market. **It is important for dentists to learn and understand the science behind the new technology and new biomaterials that help them to improve their patient's oral health as the technology is evolving so fast.**

Can you recall any particular patient cases or experiences that have had a profound impact on your career or personal growth?

The profound impact on my career was that after practicing dentistry and treating patients, I got selected for the MS dentistry program in the USA after that I was given the opportunity to be able to understand and contribute to the life cycle of new treatments, materials and technology that are researched and come into the market which can improve patients' oral health care.

In your opinion, what are the current challenges or issues facing oral health professionals in today's healthcare landscape?

The technology and materials that are being developed are still very expensive and it takes multiple visits to the dentist's office by the patients. We need to work on bringing the cost of oral health care and reducing the number of dentist visits so that it is more affordable globally.

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of? What made it meaningful or memorable?

I am particularly proud of that in the past 10 years, I have worked and contributed to research activities associated with ceramics, glass ceramics, Implants, composites, 3D printed SLM metals, dental cement, and bonding agents with now 3D printed resins. My recent achievements are that I was able to get PDAC/Medicare approval for two oral appliances for the treatment of obstructive sleep apnoea and snoring.

What advice would give to members of the dental team considering a career change?

There are many options and fields available where you can contribute directly or indirectly based on your passion and interest in oral health care if you are not interested in practicing dentistry.

DR TAEKWAN EOM

“ *My memory is all the more vivid because it was achieved after a failure.* ”



Dr Taekwan Eom

In this interview, Dr Taekwan Eom, CEO of Osstem Implants shares his journey within the company, which started 22 years ago in 2001. He first served as the head of its Research and Development (R&D) Centre until 2016 and moved into the role of CEO the following year. He believes his role in the field of oral healthcare service is to “help dentists provide better medical service to contribute to the improvement of human health

Dr Eom, what specific skills or qualities do you believe are essential for success in the field of oral health?

In the field of oral health, it is essential that we develop a good product based on our knowledge of dentistry, the dental market, and the basics. These products must be supported by comprehensive clinical guidelines to ensure their optimal use. To this end, there should be an educational infrastructure to train dentists on the product’s clinical guidelines and clinical knowledge.

Throughout my career, which includes roles such as affiliated professor at the Graduate School of Molecular Science and Technology, Ajou University (2005), director at Korea Dental Device Society (2009), and adjunct professor at Yonsei University College of Dentistry (2017), I have gained diverse insights into the realm of science and dentistry. These experiences long allowed me to recognize that digital dentistry is a major movement in the dental industry. Given that it is our core business and the degree of its technological difficulty is high, we have long been heavily investing in digital dentistry as I foresaw the necessity of developing our unique technologies.

Currently, we have launched equipment, such as milling machines and printers, and we are expected to introduce software products, such as computer-aided design (CAD), soon. As digital dentistry matures, it will empower dentists to treat patients more easily with a higher success rate. They will be able to simulate the position, direction and angle of placing implants based on the 3D image data of patients secured through computerized tomography (CT) and scanner. Such an advancement will help minimize the side effects of surgery and narrow the skill gap among dentists.

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of?

I remember when I developed a product that served as a decisive momentum for Osstem Implant to become a dominant player in the Korean implant market which had been dominated by foreign products. My memory is all the more vivid because it was achieved after a failure.

As soon as I joined Osstem Implant, I was appointed as the head of the R&D Centre in Busan. In the initial phase, I focused on establishing a system for the R&D Centre. In five years, I succeeded in developing a new type of implant by applying stress mechanical engineering, which is my field of expertise. While this implant was highly regarded for its quality in stress distribution effect, it faced limited popularity among dentists due to its technique-sensitive nature. However, it demonstrated exceptional long-term stability, which added to its value.

Recognizing the critical importance of user-friendly surgical procedures higher success rates, I redirected my efforts towards the development of more convenient products. This involved optimizing the screw shape, and the thickness and angle of the implant, making it easier for dentists to perform implantations. The result was a resounding success.

How do you stay updated with the latest advancements, research, and techniques in the field of oral health?

Since its foundation, Osstem Implant has prioritized R&D efforts and the company is recognized as one of the prominent players in the implant industry, not only in Korea, but also in the Asia-Pacific region.

After being inaugurated as the CEO of the company, I made efforts to spread the ‘feedback system’ of the research institute to the entire organization of the company. This system was put in place to ensure that we understand through a verification stage the reasons behind any negative effects resulting from our policies. We make it a practice to validate policies both during the planning and establishment phases and actively seek feedback from our customers once our products are in circulation. The importance of this continuous feedback process cannot be overstated as it is integral to improve the capabilities and job quality of our employees. The secret to technological development is endless repetition.



DR ANA STEVANOVIC

“ *Career is a marathon, not a sprint. Choose your goals carefully and don't be afraid to get creative.* ”



Dr Ana Stevanovic

MSc Certified Coach & Consultant Owner @ Stevanovic Consulting GmbH

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

I graduated dentistry in Serbia and I was a clinician for two years before I decided to do something different with my career. I got a scholarship and moved to Milan, Italy, to do a Masters in International Healthcare Management, Economics and Policy (MIHMEP) at SDA Bocconi. This led to a career in dental industry where I spent almost a decade at Curaden AG, Swiss family oral health business, leading global department of Medical Education. Today, I run my own consulting business in Switzerland, helping leaders and their teams grow radically and I still support selected companies with Medical Education and Professional Relationship Strategy.

What motivated you to pursue a career in oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that shaped your decision?

I studied dentistry because as a child I helped my family with their own business (that had nothing to do with dentistry but included a lot of manual work) and I believed dentistry combined my passion for helping others and passion for manual work. But I can honestly say that my career in oral health truly began when I started working for Curaden, where my work was tightly involved around prevention and education of dental professionals, which was fantastic and gave me a sense of deep purpose.

What specific skills or qualities do you believe are essential for success in the field of oral health?

I believe passion for the field is crucial. Dentistry is a tough job, regardless of whether you are clinician, researcher or working for the industry. Passion will drive you when things become tough (and they will). Then, love and empathy towards the patient (if you are clinician) and the same for the dental professional (if you are in the industry). Last but not least, success is progressive realization of a worthy ideal (quote from Earl Nightingale). You have to define your worthy goal, knowing how you want to grow and where you want to contribute. If you know your goal, every single step is easier to take and taking those steps makes you a success already.

Can you recall any particular patient cases or experiences that have had a profound impact on your career or personal growth?

I can name a few. Finding out I was lonely as a clinician had the most profound impact because it made me change everything about my career. **This “failure” made me brave enough to step outside my comfort zone and move to pursue something I actually enjoyed.** On the other hand, the most formative experience was my work in Curaden – working with iTOP community, professionals that teach individually trained oral prevention concept; that was something that changed how I see dentistry. Then our work with dental students, promoting hands-on approach to prevention, which is still something

where I support Curaden today from my own company. Finally, transitioning to become a mentor and coach to those leaders and their teams that are searching to achieve real growth – that is what moves me out of bed every morning.

In your opinion, what are the current challenges or issues facing oral health professionals in today's healthcare landscape?

Dentistry is still very treatment oriented instead of prevention oriented. Healthcare costs are high and two biggest diseases in dentistry are significantly contributing to global burden of noncommunicable diseases. On the other hand, it is tough being a successful dental professional because of the many expectations that are put on our shoulders: you need to be on top of the latest technology, you need to be a great clinician that puts patient first, you need to run a profitable business and you also need to be a great team leader. And most of the dental schools cover only the part of how to become a good clinician. Our education system is broken and needs to significantly improve, making dental professionals able to do all the things we expect them to do. Or we need to change our expectations. Otherwise, burnout will remain a serious problem.

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of? What made it meaningful or memorable?

If we speak about my previous work, I would say being part of the team that pushed University collaboration and advocating for better undergrad education. If we speak about my work as a coach/trainer, I would mention one recent moment that made me really proud. I was abroad, training a group of managers in a well-known dental company, and it was tough work. Once I finished, one manager approached me from the group and she told me: **“I have been working in dental industry for 22 years. You made me reconsider what I did in all these years and that was a tough thing to do. Thank you for reminding me that change is still possible.”**

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to professionals in the field of oral health who are just starting their career journey?

Career is a marathon, not a sprint. Choose your goals carefully and don't be afraid to get creative. There is a lot of different career options you can take, so choose the one you feel you will enjoy doing for a long time and that is playing to your strengths and values, because chances are you are most likely to succeed where you are willing to give your best energy for a longer period of time.

What advice would give to members of the dental team considering a career change?

Don't be afraid of career change. The fact is - employees are not staying 40 years in the same organization anymore. We need growth and it is normal to decide to grow not only vertically (towards higher position) but also horizontally and take some other type of job to grow in a different field. Know your core values and find a job that matches those values (I wrote a chapter on values in my book “Beginner with a Black Belt”). Don't worry about the lack of experience because the most important skills you get in a job are transferrable to your next job. The rest is there to be learned.

POPULATION HEALTH SERVICES AND ADVOCACY

DR ANGIE NILSSON

“ *I had an amazing work experience with an Irish dentist who convinced me that dentistry ticked the boxes. Lifestyle, variation, fulfilment.* ”



Dr Angie Nilsson

Dr Angie Nilsson has held various leadership positions in Australia and is currently working as a Clinical Director in New South Wales. Angie has worked in public and private practice with an interest in rural public oral health and reducing inequities for priority populations.

She is the Chair of the Australian Dental Association (ADA) Inc Constitution and Policy Committee and ADA Inc Federal Executive Councillor, previously serving as branch President for ADA Tasmania. She has served as a director on several boards and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Angie also has an extensive academic experience, serving as an accreditation assessor as well as contributing to peer-reviewed journals. Additionally, she has been awarded fellowships to Academy of Dentists International, International College of Dentists, and Pierre Fauchard Academy, and served as Chair of Pierre Fauchard Academy Queensland section.

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

I started in the National Health Service (NHS) as a UK graduate in 2003. After seven years, seeing 40- 50 patients daily, I was seeking a change. I had visited Australia with my husband and we were looking for a lifestyle that would be better balanced. I worked in private practice for five years but public service is vocational and I was drawn back into public health service. It was a slow transition; after giving birth to my first son, I wanted to devote more time to mentoring and education so pursued a Master's in Health Professional Education with no intent other than focusing on development and mentoring. This study led into advocacy for older people where I then continued my PhD into gerodontology education.

Over this period, I continued to work within public oral health in Australia and moved across three states to a clinical director role where the focus of the job is clinical governance. I love this role because it allows me to continue the advocacy work as part of my position and adds to the leadership work through the Australian Dental Association. In addition to this work, I enjoy working with the Australian Dental Council as an accreditation assessor and overseas graduate examiner.

What motivated you to pursue a career in oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that shaped your decision?

I always enjoyed being at the 'coal front' of patient care but at its most basic, as a 16-year-old making life decisions, I had an amazing work experience with an Irish dentist who convinced me that dentistry ticked the boxes. Lifestyle, variation, fulfilment.

In your opinion, what are the current challenges or issues facing oral health professionals in today's healthcare landscape?

I think the way dental schools are recruiting students is what shapes our profession. Where students are entering programmes without interview and based on the highest percentile of examination results, I fear we are at risk of having graduates with no intention of staying in the profession as generalists. We don't necessarily need the smartest students as dental professionals, but they do need the required soft skills and compassion to be good dental professionals for patients.

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of? What made it meaningful or memorable?

I think most people working in leadership positions would have put COVID-19 as one of the things that made or broke them. I entered my first big leadership job a few weeks before the pandemic hit the shores of Australia. It was sink or swim, and I swam. I learned that I could problem solve and be confident in my decisions and that bringing your team on the journey for 'why' a decision is being made was the most important thing to have cohesion. The result was that our service was able to recover to pre-pandemic levels very quickly, allowing our vulnerable patients to continue to access oral health care, while keeping patients and community safe through good clinical governance and process.

What advice would give to members of the dental team considering a career change?

You don't have to have an end goal in sight. Some of the most interesting people you meet (and the ones who may influence your path) are those who happened upon careers through chance and courage to take risk. If an area of study interests you, do it, volunteer for your national dental association, be a mentor for a colleague. Courage is key.



DR MARTA ZECIN

“ *Many people will not approve your career change – don’t listen to them.* ”



Dr Marta Zecin

DMD/ Partnership Coordinator, NRC (Norwegian Refugee Council)

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health?

After I graduated from university, I practiced dentistry for six years at a private clinic. I developed myself a lot in the field of endodontics and also started volunteering as a dentist in different projects in Poland and around the world. First in Cameroon, then on Lesbos and in Lebanon. That led me to completing a post-graduate diploma in humanitarian assistance. Shortly after I started working with Dental Mavericks in Lebanon as their Field Coordinator. It took me a long time trying to decide which career calls to me the most. For now the answer is humanitarian. I am working full-time with the Norwegian Refugee Council in Poland and take great satisfaction from it.

Can you recall any particular patient cases or experiences that have had a profound impact on your career or personal growth?

I recall a teenage girl from Syria that I treated at the Moria Refugee Camp on Lesbos. She came on the first day of my assignment with very poor oral hygiene, a lot of cavities and anxiety. On her first appointment I managed to treat two of her front teeth and we donated to her a toothbrush and a toothpaste. She kept coming back until the end of my stay brushing her teeth every day. **I remember that at the beginning of my stay I felt very powerless and didn’t feel I could do much of a difference for the refugees on Lesbos. But if I was able to help this girl keep her beautiful smile that was more than enough.**

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of? What made it meaningful or memorable?

One of my career highlights was a new project I developed for Dental Mavericks in Beirut, Lebanon. It was a very difficult time for us. In October 2019 a revolution started in Lebanon, and we weren’t able to bring international volunteers anymore. Then, the Covid-19 pandemic began and when the first wave finished there was a devastating explosion in Beirut port. We had to find a new way of operating and I started a collaboration between the local dental sector and Dental Mavericks. It turned out to be very effective financially and we were also able to support the local market that was suffering from an economic crisis.

What advice would give to members of the dental team considering a career change?

I always admire people who are able to turn their lives around in one year but my career change was a very long process. I still remember myself 5-6 years ago thinking: what else could I do? I only know how to be a dentist. And I could have never planned or imagined what followed. I took one step that led to another but for most of the time I felt lost. I just kept taking these small steps and following my heart. My best advice would be: many people will not approve your career change – don’t listen to them.

DR HYEWON LEE

“ *As I walked through the process of making this project a reality, I realized that the shoes of a designer and leader in a healthcare system, once thought too big for me, have become a perfect fit.* ”



Dr Hyewon Lee, DrPH DMD

Director, Seoul National University Global Maternal and Child Oral Health Center, Assistant Professor, Seoul National University School of Dentistry Chair, World Federation of Public Health Associations, Oral Health Work Group

Can you briefly describe your career path in the field of oral health? Were there any specific experiences or influences that motivated you to pursue a career in oral health?

As I take a trip down memory lane, I am intrigued by how public health became my choice of profession. I grew up as the only English-speaking child of a low-income immigrant family who had various chronic illnesses. From early childhood, I learned how simple happiness, such as family gathering over birthday parties and picnics, could be eliminated due to sickness. It was natural for me to be drawn to the concept – protection and restoration of health and happiness. After my family immigrated to the U.S. 15 years ago, another layer of challenge was waiting for us: poverty. Being sick while being poor was the worst combination I could experience. I navigated through the health system to pay for my mom’s hospital fee and fought with hospital staff for affordable payment plans. There were programmes that could help our family’s medical bills, but I had to fill out hundreds of pages to apply for those benefits. This was the time when my interest in public health started to emerge.

During my second year at Harvard School of Dental Medicine, I started to volunteer at the Windsor Street Health Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. One day, I heard the news that the health centre could no longer afford dental services for children due to financial and administrative reasons while children in the community were already on a long waiting list to see a dentist. They suffered from toothache and lack of affordable dental care. Despite being disappointed at the brutal reality of the situation, I decided to step out of the box and bring up a solution that maximized existing resources: seven dental chairs with no patient on weekend, dental students with passion to deliver care to children, and board certified paediatric dental staff who were willing to supervise the clinic in both clinical and managerial aspects. I dared to put on the shoes of a designer of systems of care, which seemed to be too big for me at the time. However, I envisioned that this student-led volunteer clinic would not only change the lives of many children but also make a mark in our community.

Throughout this challenging process of starting a student-led volunteer dental clinic, my team and I faced various obstacles – from legal to financial, from bureaucracy to criticism and doubts that this idea would not be sustainable in the long run. However, from a single-minded conviction that every child has a right to affordable and timely oral care, **I launched the first student-led volunteer paediatric dental clinic in July, 2009, with more than 80% participation of the Harvard Dental School’s pre-doctoral student body. From that day, my fellow students and I have joined hands, with supervision from attending paediatric dentists, to provide comprehensive dental care and oral health education to children one Saturday each month.** This programme is still up and running, fourteen years after my graduation. As I walked through the process of making this project a reality, I realized that the shoes of a designer and leader in a healthcare system, once thought too big for me, have become a perfect fit. That was my first step into the world of public health as a dental professional.

Can you recall any particular patient cases or experiences that have had a profound impact on your career or personal growth?

When I worked in a community health center in Harlem, New York, I had a child patient and his mother rush in for an emergency case – pain, swollen face, and sleepless nights. The patient clearly needed IV antibiotics in an emergency room. Mom hesitated to call an ambulance as her health insurance may not fully cover the ambulance ride cost, and she did not have enough for a taxi. **I called a taxi driver and paid for her, but she looked worried – she said if she missed her work like this, she might not be able to go back to work. I soon realized that it was not just a taxi fee that could solve this family’s problem – they needed a system of welfare, healthcare, and job security.** It was a daunting task for a dentist to solve, but I could contribute. After my work in the Harlem clinic, I signed up for a doctoral programme in health policy to learn to design sense-making policies for people like the mother.

Can you share a career highlight or achievement that you are particularly proud of? What made it meaningful or memorable?

I was excited when I launched a prenatal oral health programme integrated into their existing primary care in Harlem and Bronx, New York. When I worked as a policy analyst at the Department of Health, I served as an expert group panel member with others from federal governments, state governments and academia for a National Guideline for Oral Health among Pregnant Women (2012, Department of Health and Human Services). Therefore, this prenatal oral health care programme was a reality-check to test out my efforts in the health policy in a community-setting. From the prenatal oral health programme, my pregnant women patients realized the importance of oral health for themselves and their babies, and they started to make dental appointments in community dental clinics. However, when I received calls from these pregnant women that they were turned away by dental clinic staff because they were pregnant, I was angry. I realized what I missed to fully implement this programme. After these calls, I educated dental staff regarding safety of dental treatments for pregnant women based on the National Guideline. I also drafted a two-page white paper and proposed to the Chief Medical Officer of community clinics, including the safety of oral health care for pregnant women and recommendations in improving access to dental care for this population. The Chief Medical Officer fully bought in to the suggestion and is in the process of implementing an institute-wide policy to provide necessary dental care for pregnant women. It was a sweet victory.

I learned from this experience that policy and administrative guidelines that I carefully crafted at the Department of Health should be accompanied with community-driven micro-policy. This story about Harlem pregnant women can be easily found in developing countries. Nationwide public health policy and strategies can be too far or too general to make meaningful changes at a community-level. My thesis goal is to examine and evaluate the impact of micro health policy that is tailored to the community’s unique health needs in the framework of nationwide public health strategies for meaningful changes.

How do you stay updated with the latest advancements, research, and techniques in the field of oral health?

There are two recent achievements. As the chair of the World Federation of Public Health Associations Oral Health (WFPHA) Workgroup, I was able to draft and launch the WFPHA Global Maternal and Child Oral Health Initiative along with public health dental leaders around the globe. Almost 50 entities endorsed the initiative and are ready to improve the oral health of mothers and children in their countries/areas. I am also conducting clinical research that assesses the World Health Organizations’ (WHO) Essential Dental Medicine in a rural Kenyan village without electricity and adequate water. I expect this study to advance WHO’s goals and objectives in delivering essential oral health care globally by 2030.

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