

PATIENCE, PERSEVERANCE AND MOTIVATION

Interview with: Pratik Patel



Pratik Patel explains how he overcame challenges in his life with hard work and determination

As the principal dentist of TW13 Dental in Hanworth, Hounslow, Pratik Patel has never shied away from hard work and challenges. Since he was a child, his parents always told him to 'educate yourself so you don't have face the challenges we did.'

'This became a mantra in my home, but it did give me the motivation and drive I needed,' explains Pratik. 'I was exposed to hospitals since a child and so I knew whatever I did must be in healthcare. A natural love for science, being good with my hands and having good dexterity pushed me into dentistry.'

Coming from a very much working class background, his father came to the UK from Uganda with a borrowed ticket and £1 in his pocket. 'Together with my mother, they started building a good life for themselves, travelling and trying to keep a good work-life balance.'

Pratik was born in 1981 and following a health problem, his mother was unable to work. 'In my house there was no such thing as mine. We worked as a unit compensating for each other's weakness and helping to build each other's strengths. I saw my father work two jobs seven days a week to keep us going without ever complaining.'

It was unfortunate that Pratik's

mother would be in hospital during every exam he had. 'I would take my folders and revise there. From my father I learnt patience, perseverance, and sacrifice and from my mother I learnt strength of mind over matter, focus and knowing I could do whatever I put my mind to. Together we got through tough times and it made me prioritise and contextualise the important things in my life. It provided me with a clearer vision of where I wanted to go in life and gave me a lot of the skills I still utilise today,' he explains.

TW13DENTAL



BUYING AND RUNNING HIS FIRST PRACTICE

He bought his practice TW13 Dental in January 2012 when he was 29 years old with his business partner Neel Panchal whilst it was a well-established two surgery freehold practice.

'Over the next five years we have gone through significant refurbishment and staff restructuring to get it to where it is today. I had been an educational supervisor with Health Education England for eight years and so we bought Dental Foundation Training to the practice in 2015. We started conversion of a third surgery at the end of 2016 and we have introduced implants to the practice this year,' he adds.

'Up until this year Neel and myself managed the practice and carried out most of the clinical work ourselves,' he explains. However, with growing compliance needs, expanding patient numbers and more services, they had to train a senior member of staff to take over practice management duties. This has given both Neel and Pratik the opportunity to intentionally lead rather than micro-manage the practice.

'I try to block out small slots in my book to help me strategically plan and manage the practice. We use Code to help keep us compliant and ensure ►



tasks can be assigned to each staff member and we can manage when the tasks have been completed. We outsource our HR but appraise our staff ourselves biannually to manage performance and to have the opportunity for us to give constructive feedback. I have weekly meetings with my practice manager and head nurse to ensure smooth running together with informal daily huddles with all my staff. We link this all together with regular practice meetings. We always reward good performance with bonuses and regular nights out, which helps with team building.'

His typical working week is varied. 'Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays I work as an associate in North London. These days are less heavy for me and so I can arrange evening meetings (related to my LDC and charity work) after work usually on these days or I will plan a couple of 5km runs if I have no meetings planned. On Mondays I learn classical Indian music with the harmonium, which helps engage the creative side of my brain!'

Wednesdays and Thursdays are spent at his practice. 'These are heavier days where I work through my lunch on most days and finish quite late.' On Fridays Pratik helps to feed the homeless with 'food for life' after work.

STERLING DENTAL GROUP

Pratik's philosophy for giving back doesn't end there. 'I got involved with the charity Sterling Dental Foundation as a treasurer in 2015,' he says. 'The Foundation is a charity dedicated to improving health and education both in the UK and in India. The Foundation supported Bobby's Walk in 2015 where Bobby Grewal walked the length of India at the age of 80 in aid of Great Ormond Street Hospital and the British Asian Trust where over £15,000 was raised. A children's camp was organised in South India and an oral cancer screening camp in the Punjab in collaboration with World Cancer Care organisation.'

'In Dec 2016 we donated a cheque for £22,209 to GOSH raised from our annual event, following our ethos of 'Making Children Smile' and this year the foundation has set up their own mobile dental unit and the plans are to provide emergency dental care for those who find access to dentists the hardest for example the homeless.'

GOALS AND DECISIONS

When asked about his achievements, Pratik says 'I am most proud of the change I have

started to create with Brent and Harrow LDC with my co-chair Hetal Patel. It has enabled me to put a lot of the leadership and management knowledge that I have learnt from Fiona Stuart Wilkinson into practice. We went back to the drawing board and came up with a mission statement,



vision, short-term and long-term goals and set up subcommittees to fulfill these.' With a successful networking event in September, which has engaged the largest number of local practitioners to date, the organisation has become an exemplary leading LDC in London. 'I feel this has enabled me to give back something to my profession,' he adds.

And what have been Pratik's best decisions? 'I like being involved with all the different aspects of dentistry,' he answers. 'Education, political, management and leadership and clinical. This keeps my week interesting and stops it becoming monotone. I enjoy being well networked within the profession and learn a lot from the network I have.'

Patient communication is the most important part of dentistry to Pratik. In his words, not just to gain valid consent but to build a good rapport over time. 'A skilled

dentist with poor communication skills will be perceived as a bad dentist by patients and the same is also conversely true,' he says.

He also adds that in dentistry, errors can be made. 'Mistakes have formed some of my greatest learning opportunities in my life. Once you have no problems making mistakes, admitting them, and correcting them, mistakes will rarely occur.'

OUT OF THE SURGERY

Pratik feels that education is a key element to his success. 'I feel like I am an eternal student! I do like to take some time out of clinical dentistry when I can to go on courses and train. I am currently shadowing a periodontist/implantologist to help me get into implant placement. I have also learnt a lot through various dental forums and peer review evenings.'

Pratik starts every morning with an hour and a half of yoga and meditation. 'This gives me stillness and calmness to tackle a busy day and provides me with the balance I need and helps to keep me focused. I have an open door policy at my house. Many close friends and family have a key! So my friends have become my family and my family are also like my friends. I enjoy travelling and try to make a couple of trips a year. Supporting 'food for life' in India is also a big part of my life.'

What are his plans for the future? 'Once I finish my PGCert in Dental Education I would like to

start a Masters and possibly acquire another practice. So watch this space!'

'The only constant in life is change. So we need to be open and adaptive to change all the time,' concludes Pratik. 'We need to be comfortable working outside of our comfort zone; otherwise we limit our own growth. If you do not get out of you shell, you are just a nut! We only get change by doing something different and we only

get growth by evolving.' ●

FACT FILE

QUALIFICATIONS: BDS (Birm)

MJDF, Diploma in Executive Dental Management & level 7, level 5 Certificate in Management & Leadership.

Currently studying PGCert in dental education
POSITION: Principal dentist at TW13 Dental. Co-chair of Brent and Harrow LDC; also representing London GDPs on the London Orthodontic procurement 'clinical work stream'. Educational Supervisor with HEE. Treasurer with Sterling Dental.

DENTAL INTERESTS: General dentistry, orthodontics, dental education, political dentistry.
INTERESTS OUT OF DENTISTRY: Travel, running, yoga, harmonium, charity work.

COMMENTS TO PRIVATE DENTISTRY

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