

# Ten under 10

*F*or the second year and as part of what is now an annual feature, the Massachusetts Dental Society Standing Committee on the New Dentist and the *JOURNAL OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DENTAL SOCIETY* are highlighting 10 dentists who have been in the profession for 10 years or less—"The Ten Under 10." These profiles highlight the issues facing new dentists as well as the changing demographics in dentistry. The Ten Under 10 dentists were surveyed about the many different and sometimes challenging aspects of the profession that the new dentist faces on a daily basis. These dentists have generously shared their experiences on everything from how to balance work and family, to the importance of gaining patients'—and colleagues'—trust, to the benefits of providing care to those less fortunate.

*To qualify for selection, dentists must have graduated from dental school in the past 10 years and have made a significant contribution to the profession, their community, or organized dentistry. A call for nominations was sent to MDS member dentists in September (nominees are required to be current MDS members), and nominations were reviewed and final selections chosen by the MDS Standing Committee on the New Dentist in November.*

*Congratulations to these young dentists, the profession's future.*



## Anjum A. Ansari, DMD

**RESIDENCE:** Waltham  
**OFFICE LOCATION:** Milford  
**SPECIALTY:** General dentistry  
**EDUCATION:** Temple University  
School of Dentistry; general  
practice residency at  
Northwestern University

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

The biggest challenge for me was finding an existing office that really complemented my practice philosophy, as well as finding people who believed in my abilities. It is very easy to question your abilities when everyone else is. It took me a long time to find a practice where I was comfortable with the other clinician and was able to flex my dental muscle.

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

The biggest reward I have experienced is the respect I get from people when I tell them I am a dentist and that I am actively involved in the MDS. As an American female whose parents emigrated from India, I am truly grateful for all the opportunities I have been afforded. As early as two generations ago in India, it was highly uncommon for a woman to be a professional and in a position to care for herself and her family if the need arose.

The fact that I am a professional and am able to contribute to the greater good as well as being empowered financially is quite an accomplishment.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

Do the best dentistry you know, have compassion for your patients, and never stop learning. Don't think you know everything—always look for more ways to improve your knowledge of the profession. Enjoy your practice and protect your ability to practice dentistry at all costs.

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I always take some time just for me—this helps me to better prioritize work and family obligations. I want everything that I do to be the best I can. If I find that I am not giving my all to something, I have to regroup and approach the task differently or just lighten my load.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Owning my own practice and staying active with the MDS. I would like to continue encouraging new dentists to get involved with organized dentistry. Our profession and those who came before us have worked so tirelessly to ensure we have such prestige. We owe it to future generations to keep the face of dentistry current, relevant, and engaged with the general population. ■



## Nicole Balthazar, DMD

**RESIDENCE:** North Falmouth  
**OFFICE LOCATION:** Forestdale  
**SPECIALTY:** General dentistry  
**EDUCATION:** Tufts University  
School of Dental Medicine

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

One of the biggest challenges for me was opening my private practice. Choosing the right dental supply company and computer software for your practice can be stressful. Planning and organization will get you to the opening day. Also, the business end of your practice, understanding the thousands of different insurance companies, and the variations of each patient's benefits takes time. This is not something you learn in school. Marketing my practice and examining the geographical area and patient needs helped me build my practice quickly.

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

One of the biggest rewards of being a dentist is being able to educate my patients. Building relationships with my patient base has put my practice where it is today. Teaching at our local college in the dental hygiene program has been rewarding, as I get

to see the students graduating and moving into the dental field. On a personal level, my husband and I have had great opportunities to meet fellow professionals who share our same interests.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

If there is a student searching to open his or her own dental practice shortly after graduating, the best advice I can give is as follows: Take a practice management course; understanding what your software will do for you will make your office grow and keep it organized. Take a course with Delta Dental. Spend some time with a local dentist and see how his or her office runs on a daily basis. Join the local dental society in your area. And become a member of the MDS.

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

Time management. If you haven't taken a course in time management, do so! "The One Minute Manager" series by Kenneth Blanchard is great.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

In 10 years, I see myself enjoying life with my family and friends. My practice will be even more established with active patients. I will remain a teacher at the college, as I really enjoy teaching. ■



## Ryan M. Clancy, DMD

**RESIDENCE:** Lynnfield  
**OFFICE LOCATION:** Medford  
**SPECIALTY:** General dentistry  
**EDUCATION:** Tufts University School of Dental Medicine; AEGD, Tripler Army Medical Center, Hawaii, U.S. Army

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

Committing to eight years in the Army before starting dental school was a daunting thought. But when I look back on that decision and those years, I wouldn't change anything. The education and training that I received while at Tufts and in the military are priceless.

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

My greatest reward has to be returning home to my wife and family in early 2004 after a one-year deployment to Iraq. Knowing that my family was worried, without hearing from me for long periods of time or knowing where I was located, was tough. Over the course of one year we were able to provide

frontline dental care to U.S. soldiers, coalition soldiers, contracted civilians, and Iraqis. Looking back on those days, I take great pride in knowing that through great sacrifice we contributed a small part to our country's overall mission and goals.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

You have entered a great profession at a great time. Stay involved in organized dentistry as you transition from student to professional. Complete a residency, if at all possible. Maximize continuing education for lifelong learning.

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I balance them with great care. I truly believe that one can negatively affect the other if you are not careful. Setting goals, working hard, and rewarding myself are some of the ways that I maintain balance.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I see myself continuing to grow both professionally and personally. I plan to stay active in organized dentistry. In my future, I do see trying some aspect of teaching to have an additional positive impact on others. ■



## William J. "BJ" Coakley III, DMD

**RESIDENCE:** Leominster  
**OFFICE LOCATION:** Fitchburg  
**SPECIALTY:** General dentistry  
**EDUCATION:** University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

I was very fortunate when I began my professional career because I immediately went into practice with my father. The biggest challenge for me was remaining patient. Like most new graduates, I was eager to use all that I had learned in school in the "real world" setting, but it took patience and time for those opportunities to present themselves.

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

My personal relationships have been my biggest reward. My work environment has provided me with many new relationships over the past four years. Being able to work closely with my father and mother every day has allowed our relationship to evolve to another level. My father has been practicing general dentistry in our community for more than 30 years, and my mother is a dental hygienist who has been right there with him building their practice for all that time. The confidence that they and the rest of our staff have shown in me from the beginning has allowed me to grow into a better doctor and a better person.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

I would advise dental students to be honest with themselves and confident in their abilities, to take advantage of any and all opportunities to expose themselves to new techniques and experiences in dentistry. I didn't realize how much I would draw on those experiences every day in practice. Most of all, I would tell them to enjoy it. Looking back, dental school was such a great experience and I made such solid friendships. You start to miss those long days in clinic with your classmates a couple years after you're out!

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I believe that if you are not happy personally, this will affect you negatively professionally. The satisfaction I get out of my personal life carries over into my work. I feel as though I have a positive attitude about life, and in turn, that outlook extends to my work. I love going to work every day; I enjoy the challenges that dentistry brings and the people I get to work with.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Professionally, I see our practice continuing to grow. I hope to become more involved with the groups I am currently involved with, such as the MDS Standing Committee on the New Dentist.

Personally, I've learned that you never quite know what life has in store for you, and not to ignore any opportunities for new experiences . . . so I'm happy to say that I don't know where I'll be in 10 years personally, but I can promise you it'll be fun getting there! I do hope to get my golf handicap into the single digits, though! ■



## John J. Giordano, RDH, DMD

**RESIDENCE:** Holden  
**OFFICE LOCATION:** Worcester  
**SPECIALTY:** General dentistry  
**EDUCATION:** Tufts University School of Dental Medicine; University of Texas Health Science Center, Center for

Research and Education in Forensics

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

The financial strain of balancing student loans with daily living expenses, the inability to obtain disability insurance essential to professional security due to prior illness, and a youthful appearance were all obstacles. My very first patient, a 68-year-old woman, said to me when I walked in and introduced myself, "Are you old enough to be doing this?" I use humor often and so without skipping a beat I responded: "No, I'm not even a dentist." She gave me a puzzled look and then we both laughed.

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

Professionally, it was a huge milestone when I bought into my practice and built my new office in 2004. The day the new office

was finished, I sat alone in my new operatory and just took it all in, realizing how lucky I have been. Personally, the genuine appreciation of my patients in the practice and their trust in my abilities reward me daily. In the forensic realm, the first identification I did on human remains made me realize I was here for a purpose. All the hard work to get to this point was well worth it.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

Stay true to your professional ethics and treat every patient with dignity and compassion. Success comes easily after this.

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

Balance is hard to achieve. I believe if you have the ability to recognize when one part of your life is imposing on another, you're ahead of the game. I try not to discuss business outside the office, and I try to make time for my wife and myself daily. Without the daily support and understanding of my wife, I'm not sure I would know what balance is.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I would like to have the ability to spend additional time on the academic side of forensics and dentistry. Overall, I would prefer to take one day at a time and report back in 10 years! ■



## Dorothy (Deedee) Gurin, DMD

**RESIDENCE:** Boston  
**OFFICE LOCATION:** Milton  
**TEACHING:** Boston University School of Dental Medicine  
**SPECIALTY:** General dentistry  
**EDUCATION:** Boston University School of Dental Medicine; Forsyth School for Dental Hygienists

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

When I began my career, the biggest obstacle for me was putting it all together. In four years of dental school, you are stuffed with all of this knowledge that you need to figure out on your own. You leave the security of a big institution to practice in a small dental office that seems so much larger. All of the knowledge that I acquired in four years was coming out all at once! It was a challenge to sort through it all and practice to the best of my abilities. As dentists, I think we are very hard on ourselves.

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

Gaining the respect and trust of patients, peers, coworkers, and family has been my biggest reward, personally and professionally, since leaving dental school. Furthermore, I am fortunate in that I enjoy my profession. Every morning, I awake knowing that my days will be filled with enriching experiences.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

If I were to give any advice, it would be to always ask for advice! I would advocate that they work with colleagues whom they respect. Throughout their careers, mentors will help guide them as they gain experience and face new challenges. I am fortunate to still have my mentors, who are an immense part of my life.

Additionally, I would encourage them to give back to their profession by volunteering, in the community where they practice, with the MDS and their local dental society, through non-profit organizations, and in underserved areas.

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

As dentists, we do spend more time in our offices than we do at home. This makes it arduous to maintain equilibrium between our professional and personal lives. The balance for me comes from overlapping my career with my personal life. Since we love to travel together, my husband always joins me at the educational meetings I attend. Last year, we went to both the ADA meeting and the AGD meeting. He even took a CE course at YDC 31.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

In 10 years, I foresee that I will be in a practice that continues to flourish, that I will continue to volunteer in organized dentistry, that I will go on to help those who are in need, and that I will remain involved in academics. These different aspects of dentistry reward me with a sense of balance in my profession. ■



## Minaj Naimi-Riahi, DDS

**RESIDENCE:** Brighton  
**OFFICE LOCATION:** Boston  
**SPECIALTY:** General dentistry  
**EDUCATION:** University of the Pacific School of Dentistry

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

Within a year of graduating from dental school, I purchased an existing practice. The most challenging part was transitioning from only concentrating on the dental needs of my patients to addressing and learning how to run the business end of a dental office. I had to really learn how to interact with the staff, not so much as a coworker anymore but as an employer. Some of the key staff members had more than 15–20 years of dental office experience and were much older than I am. Being only 27 and coming from a culture where respect for the elderly is so highly regarded, it was very difficult for me to implement and enforce change. I had to quickly gain the confidence needed to lead.

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

One of the greatest aspects of dentistry is that most of the procedures give patients immediate results. Over the past few years, I

have really enjoyed focusing on the cosmetic/esthetic area of dentistry. To be able to restore teeth for patients who had been embarrassed to smile and reestablish their self-esteem is very rewarding.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

There is a world of dental procedures and concepts that is not taught in dental school. When you graduate, you are a safe beginner. It is so important to be open to learning what has worked for other dentists. Be a sponge and absorb as much information as you can from your colleagues.

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I try very hard not to bring home the stresses of work. It helps that my husband is also a dentist, and he understands the daily challenges of practicing dentistry. We both have a great passion for our profession but have also learned to keep active in our personal hobbies.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Working in a multidisciplinary office has really given me the tools to provide comprehensive treatments for my patients in one setting. I would like to start a mentorship program where dental students can observe how important this service is to patients' overall care. ■



## Kevin Leonard Peterson, DMD

**RESIDENCE:** Boston  
**OFFICE LOCATION:** Brookline  
**SPECIALTY:** Endodontics  
**EDUCATION:** Boston University School of Dental Medicine

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

The biggest challenge I faced when I began my professional career was applying to clinical practice all the theory and knowledge I had learned in my studies. During our studies we are presented with the many principles of all the disciplines of dentistry, and upon graduation we are asked to apply all that we have learned to those who seek our services. Specializing in endodontics has afforded me the opportunity to focus on one discipline, while keeping in mind the theories the other specialties have to offer.

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

Our lives as dentists are intertwined with both professional and personal aspects. My greatest reward professionally has been my involvement with organized dentistry. My involvement with both the state dental and endodontic societies has helped me to greater appreciate my responsibilities as a dentist and an endodontist.

Personally, the greatest reward that I have experienced since leaving dental school has been the help and care I provide for patients. Being an endodontist, I am able to help patients suffering from debilitating discomfort. The service we provide proves invaluable when you see the patients leaving the office happier than when they arrived or when you call them later on the phone and they thank you for taking such good care of them.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

My advice for any graduating student from the dental school would be not to forget ethics. It is what is best for patients.

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

The perfect balance for my professional and personal lives begins with happiness. It is important to enjoy and appreciate the office and the family that support your endeavors. Furthermore, the values from my personal life are the same that I apply in my professional life, and vice versa. Achieving this balance will ultimately lead to great happiness.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

In 10 years, I see myself being an even better endodontist. The clinical knowledge that we gain with years of practice will only make us better clinicians. I also see myself enjoying the advancements that dentistry and endodontics will develop with time and research. ■



## Sara Runnels, DMD, MD

**RESIDENCE:** Milton  
**OFFICE LOCATIONS:** Walpole, Dedham, and Wellesley  
**SPECIALTY:** Oral and Maxillofacial surgery  
**EDUCATION:** Tufts University School of Dental Medicine; MD from Columbia University

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

As a petite woman, I am constantly asked by many of my patients (and by some referring doctors) whether I have enough experience and physical strength to perform my job. It challenges me to be my best to ensure that these patients have a great experience so that any doubts they have in me are erased completely. I also take care of some of the players for the New England Patriots, and these big athletes, conversely, never seem to question my size or gender!

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

Since my residency, I have been involved with a group called Healing the Children. This national organization provides free surgical care to children in developing countries with cleft lip,

cleft palate, and other facial deformities, people who would otherwise not have access to medical services.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

Make the most of any educational opportunities you can before you start in practice. The confidence you gain with extra education will make you more successful both professionally and personally. Try to keep up with the latest literature and techniques. And if you can, become board certified in your specialty.

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

For me, the key is good communication with loved ones. Fortunately, I married a wonderful man (an emergency physician in Boston) who allows me to “talk shop” at home. In addition, I find that stress relievers like regular exercise or other hobbies help make me more sane and relaxed.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I hope to continue to help our private practice grow, to keep up with the latest techniques, and to continue to learn about oral and maxillofacial surgery and medicine. I hope to become a well-experienced, skilled cleft surgeon. I am also hoping to volunteer with one of the local teaching institutions, and hopefully inspire more young women to become oral surgeons. ■



## David Mitchell Singer, DMD

**RESIDENCE:** Reading  
**OFFICE LOCATIONS:** Boston and Lynnfield  
**SPECIALTY:** Endodontics  
**EDUCATION:** Tufts University School of Dental Medicine

### What was the biggest challenge/obstacle you experienced when you began your professional career?

Probably one of the biggest challenges, at first, was learning how to gain the patient’s confidence quickly. I joined a well-established practice where patients had high expectations for their care, and they were sometimes leery of a specialist who looked young. In endodontics, we often meet the patient and finish treatment in one visit, so there isn’t much time for establishing rapport. Additionally, the patients are often pretty nervous anyway, or in pain. But I found, over time, that most of them were receptive if I could make them understand that I cared about their perception of the procedure.

### What has been the biggest reward, professionally, personally, or both, that you have experienced since you left dental school?

One of the best rewards is when patients tell me they’ve had their best dental experience ever in my chair. Or when they laugh or sing with me through the appointment, or fall asleep during the procedure after telling me how afraid they were at first. It’s a nice

thing to show people that a root canal doesn’t have to be an ordeal. It’s also a good feeling to give back to Tufts by teaching there and to be so involved in the North Shore District Dental Society and the American Academy of Dental Sciences.

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from dental school this year?

Even though it’s a high-pressure, high-stress environment sometimes, it’s so important to remember to treat people the way you would want to be treated. I think when you see so many people a day it can be easy to forget that, but remembering it is key.

### How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I have three kids under the age of 9, so they keep me focused on what’s really important. Also, when I’m home, I always have a project going. I benefit from remembering that I have strengths outside of the office. I’ve really enjoyed my appointment to the Board of Health in my town, which gives me a broader perspective on public health.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I’m always looking for ways to be innovative and to improve things, so I hope that before 10 years have passed I will have found myriad novel approaches to what I do each day. My work with the microscope and other advances in my field has shown me that technology is something I can embrace, so I will keep my eyes open for ways to keep my office on the cutting edge. ■