

# 2010

## TEN UNDER 10

For the last five years, the *JOURNAL OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DENTAL SOCIETY* has been working with the MDS Standing Committee on the New Dentist to shine a spotlight on the “Ten Under 10”—10 MDS member dentists who have been in the profession for 10 years or less. On the following pages, you will meet the 2010 Ten Under 10 honorees and learn more about their thoughts on organized dentistry, challenges they faced when they started out, how they balance their professional and personal lives, and more.

To qualify for selection for the Ten Under 10, dentists must have graduated from dental school in the past 10 years, be current MDS members, and have made a significant contribution to the profession, their community, or organized dentistry—or all of the above. A call for nominations was sent to MDS member dentists in the fall and solicited on the MDS Web site and weekly *Membership Matters* newsletter. Nominations were reviewed and final selections were chosen by the MDS Standing Committee on the New Dentist in December.

**Congratulations to the  
2010 Ten Under 10—the future of the  
Massachusetts Dental Society.**

## Heidi Birnbaum Aaronson, DMD



Current Residence: **Burlington**  
Hometown: **Newton**  
Office Location: **Wellesley**  
Specialty: **General Dentistry**  
Dental Education: **Tufts University School of Dental Medicine**

### What do you like about being a dentist?

I love the wide range of procedures I get to do as a general dentist. On a typical day, I may see a 2-year-old child for his first dental visit, complete a root canal on a middle-aged patient, fit a high school athlete for a mouthguard, or restore an elderly woman's front tooth so she can feel comfortable smiling again. On a personal level, I love working alongside my father in the dental practice he started more than 35 years ago. We've both learned a lot from each other, and it has been incredibly meaningful, after years of looking over his shoulder, to be able to work side-by-side.

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career thus far?

Starting out as a new dentist in an economic recession has been difficult. While things are slowly improving, it has been a challenge to fill my schedule on a daily basis. For now, I'm only in the office three days a week, and I volunteer as a clinical instructor at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine. Because my schedule is so unpredictable and due to having so many holes in my workday, we have not been able to hire a dental assistant, so I work solo for most procedures. I've talked with other new dentists who are facing similar challenges, so I know it's not uncommon, but it's still frustrating to have so many openings in my schedule.

### You've been very active in dental charity work, most notably with organizing Tooth Day at Fenway Park. What led you to launch that program?

Giving back to the community has always been important to me. Early in my second year of dental school, I was watching a Red Sox game and noticed one of the players chewing tobacco. I was taking an oral pathology class at the time, and seeing the ramifications of chewing tobacco made me think about what I could do to educate more people, especially the kids who look up to professional athletes, on why chewing tobacco is so dangerous. I contacted Dr. Charles Steinberg, who was vice president of public affairs for the Red Sox. Dr. Steinberg is also a dentist, and with his help, I was able to organize the first Tooth Day at Fenway Park in July 2006.

The goal for Tooth Day at Fenway is to educate the public regarding the dangers of chewing tobacco and to offer free oral cancer screenings to fans before game time. TUSDM donated toothbrushes and toothpaste that are handed out to fans, in addition to brochures on oral cancer and the dangers of smokeless tobacco. We set up an oral cancer screening station and were surprised by the number of fans who had suspicious lesions they had "been meaning to get checked out but never got around to." We even screened some Fenway Park employees in whose mouths we found several premalignant lesions.

The success of the first Tooth Day led the Red Sox front office to add the event to the Red Sox season calendar year after year. Every year, we are able to add new technologies, which allow us to improve our screening success. I was even asked to throw out the ceremonial first pitch before the game for Tooth Day 2007. ■

## George K. Etre, DDS



Current Residence: **East Sandwich**  
Hometown: **Zahle, Lebanon**  
Office Locations: **Hyannis, Harwich, and Falmouth**  
Specialty: **Endodontics**  
Dental Education: **New York University College of Dentistry (DDS and Certificate in Endodontics); Lutheran Medical Center (AEGD)**

### Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

My grandfather, who passed away before I was born, was a dentist. Hearing the stories of how he was able to help people is what made me want to become a dentist.

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career thus far?

How to maintain a successful and profitable practice, while at the same time helping patients who are facing economic hardships, is probably the biggest challenge I've faced.

### You've been very active in the MDS, particularly the Cape Cod District Dental Society (CCDDS). What made you become a participant in the Society and the CCDDS, and where do you see your future in organized dentistry?

Organized dentistry is extremely important. Our profession wouldn't be where it is today without organized dentistry. The mentorship of my partners—Drs. Bob Kittredge, Gabriel Tagher, and Kevin Choi—is what got me involved in organized dentistry. Very quickly, I realized how important organized dentistry is and how crucial it is for dentists to become more involved, especially in these times of economic and political uncertainty.

### What impact do you think the local district dental society has on organized dentistry?

Organized dentistry at the district level is extremely important because it is the building block for the state and national organizations. I urge every dentist to become involved. Not only because the future of our profession depends on it, but also because of the gratifying experience gained by doing volunteer work and contributing to the profession.

### You are married to a practicing dentist. How do you balance work and family?

My family is the most important thing in my life. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to be in a profession that allows me to enjoy my family and spend as much time as possible with my wife and daughter, while at the same time enjoying going to work on a daily basis. ■

## Matthew R. Fantasia, DMD, FAGD



Current Residence: **Wellesley**  
Hometown: **Winchester**  
Office Location: **Wellesley**  
Specialty: **General Dentistry**  
Dental Education: **Tufts University School of Dental Medicine; U.S. Army (AEGD-1 Program)**

### What do you like about being a dentist?

What I enjoy most are the day-to-day interactions with patients. I enjoy being a part of their health care team and educating them about their oral health in order to better serve their dental needs. My goal when choosing this profession was to try to make dental care as positive an experience as possible for patients.

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career thus far?

Transitioning from military dentistry to practicing in a private practice setting was a big adjustment. The dentistry was the same, but patient management/treatment planning was quite different. In private practice, providers are able to base treatment-planning decisions on a continued, ongoing relationship of care with patients, whereas military dentistry requires immediate, definitive care because many patients may soon find themselves in areas of the world without access to dental care.

### You were in the U.S. Army AEGD Program. How does working in the armed services sector differ from the private sector?

In the military, there were other duties and responsibilities besides simply practicing dentistry day-to-day in the clinic. Although I gained a tremendous amount of experience practicing in the Army, I had to modify my treatment planning and patient management skills, given the transient nature of my patient population. The biggest drawback to practicing in the military was the inability to follow cases over an extended period of time to learn from treatment-planning decisions made as a young provider.

### You are active in the Yankee Dental Congress. What made you become involved in YDC and why do you think it's important that members volunteer for the conference?

My partner was involved in YDC in a leadership capacity when I joined his practice. I started out helping with the Hands-On Committee and have been involved ever since. I enjoy being involved and meeting new colleagues. It's important for younger dentists to get involved in order to keep improving YDC and maintaining the level of excellence achieved by our predecessors; the responsibility of planning and executing this terrific meeting should not fall on the shoulders of the same core group of people year after year. It's very rewarding and I'd encourage members to get involved at some level.

### With the extent of your volunteering commitments, how do you balance your personal and professional lives?

I believe this balance is crucial to a long, sustained dental career. My time with my family is the most important aspect of my life and is always a priority for me. I am lucky to practice and live in the same community, which makes my commute minimal and allows me to attend my children's school functions. I keep myself available for after-hours emergencies and patient issues. I believe patients gain comfort in knowing that they can reach me at all times. I believe it's our obligation to our patients to provide the highest level of service, even if it impacts our family from time to time. ■

## Paul S. Gamber Jr., DMD



Current Residence: **Wenham**  
Hometown: **Meriden, CT**  
Office Location: **Danvers**  
Specialty: **General Dentistry**  
Dental Education: **Tufts University School of Dental Medicine**

### Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

Dentistry was a second career for me. I began my professional life as an insurance claims adjuster. What I loved about handling claims was reviewing a person's injuries, the treatment rendered, and the appropriateness of the treatment in determining a benefit. I was introduced to an oral surgeon in South Portland, who I shadowed for a week, and became "hooked" on dentistry. I began my career thinking I would become an oral surgeon, but after being introduced to all the disciplines, I decided that prosthodontics was a perfect fit because it allows me to express the artistic abilities that I have always enjoyed. Who knew whittling a piece of wood as a kid would have an impact on my chosen profession?

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career thus far?

Balancing time is the biggest challenge, whether it is time devoted to work vs. family, or to patient treatment vs. practice management. After graduation, I accepted an associate position with Dr. Jeffrey Dornbush, a prosthodontist in Marblehead, knowing that I was going to learn a lot. This required a lot of time beyond patient treatment, whether it was reviewing cases in the office or attending a large number of CE courses.

Then, when I bought my practice, I felt the need to be there as much as possible to develop the patient care and practice management aspects of the business. Although I am a general dentist, I have a passion for and focus my practice strictly on prosthodontics. I am committed to continuing education, so I devote a large amount of time and resources to my continued development and that of my team. Also, managing the business side of dentistry is difficult to balance with the time spent on patient care. You have to surround yourself with good people in both areas—you need a good team and you need a good team of professionals who can take care of the business side of things.

### You were a member of the Council on Dental Practice from 2005 to 2009. What was the biggest takeaway from your involvement?

My biggest takeaway is the stake the MDS has in furthering the success of the profession and the selflessness of the people who commit a good amount of their time for the benefit of dentists throughout the state. The council took up issues and projects that help the dentist on a daily basis, including creation of a "Dental Office Policies and Procedures Checklist" for members to use as a reminder for maintaining equipment, license renewals, CE requirements, employee training, and business insurance.

### You are a national lecturer for 3M and 3i. Do you see yourself pursuing a future in dental education?

Lecturing is actually one of my biggest fears! However, I like the challenge, and I love educating people about things that I have a passion for. I would love to be involved in dental education; however, the issue there is that the time you take to teach takes time away from your practice or your family. My practice and family are both "young" at this point. Hopefully, I will be given the opportunity to teach in the future. I'd love to teach at Tufts, which I see as giving back to the university that gave me my opportunity. ■

## Robert J. Gauthier Jr., DMD



Current Residence: **Berlin**  
Hometown: **Marlborough**  
Office Location: **Northborough**  
Specialty: **General Dentistry**  
Dental Education: **University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine**

### What do you like about being a dentist?

I love dentistry. I see much of what I do as artistry. Restorative and cosmetic dentistry is much like “micro-sculpture,” if you will. This allows me to express myself artistically every day, and that makes going to the office enjoyable.

### What’s the biggest challenge you’ve faced in your career thus far?

My biggest challenge has been learning to manage my dental team and patients. People all have different personalities, and I have had to learn how to be effective in getting the desired outcomes for specific situations. Whether getting a team member on board with a new treatment or office procedure, or having a patient understand and accept treatment, I have to be cognizant of that individual’s personality type and specific needs. These skills have been the hardest for me to attain, but I believe that I’ve gotten much better with time and practice.

### You are a current participant in the MDS Leadership Institute. What drew you to the program and what do you think you are getting out of it?

I was drawn to the Leadership Institute to attain and prepare myself for my upcoming role as chair of the Worcester District Dental Society. The curriculum of the Leadership Institute has been great. It has given me good leadership tools and has also taken me out of my comfort zone at times. The Public Speaking Workshop was one of those times. The feedback, both positive and negative, that I received from the speech coach has given me more confidence in the realm of public speaking. These skills will serve me in all aspects of my professional and personal life for years to come.

### You are currently vice chair and chair-elect of the Worcester District Dental Society. What has been your biggest challenge as vice chair?

The biggest challenge I have faced has been getting younger dentists to get active in the Society.

### What impact do you think the local district dental society has on organized dentistry?

I believe that the district is the basis for the state and national levels of organized dentistry. Without the districts, what would be the point of the Massachusetts Dental Society or the American Dental Association? The district is where the proverbial “rubber hits the road.” The district is where many of the benefits of membership are realized. The district is why I got involved in the MDS. It’s where I find my connection to the profession. My district colleagues are my neighbors, friends, and fellow dentists. ■

## Norman E. Lee, DMD



Current Residence: **Jamaica Plain**  
Hometown: **Boston**  
Office Location: **Wilbraham**  
Specialty: **Periodontology**  
Dental Education: **Tufts School of Dental Medicine (DMD and Advanced Certificate in Periodontics)**

### Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

It combines the things that I love—art, medicine, and surgery—in a technically difficult field. Dentistry also allows me the reward of making an immediate and positive impact on someone’s everyday life.

### What’s the biggest challenge you’ve faced in your career thus far?

Endeavoring to start and manage a new practice is by far the most difficult challenge of my professional career. It is quite challenging to be an effective leader. A great leader stands by his or her principles and ethics rather than taking the easy way out. I remember a mentor of mine telling me, “It is not the things you do when people are watching; rather, it is the things that you do when no one is watching.” This statement is something that I take with me every day.

### You’ve been active on the MDS Council on Membership. How would you describe your experience on that council?

Serving on the Council on Membership has been an enriching experience that provides me with a new insight into organized dentistry. We need to encourage young dentists to take more active leadership roles. It has encouraged me to reach out and develop relationships to bridge the gap between younger and older dentists at different stages of their professional development.

### You participated in the development of the MDS Guest Board Member Program. Why do you think a program such as that is important?

Being part of a group that fosters leadership in the profession of dentistry is important. In a mentoring role, we can best learn how to organize and how to lead with a strong voice in our profession.

### When you’re not working, what do you do with your free time?

I enjoy challenges such as long-distance road biking (including the annual 150-mile Harpoon Brewery B2B ride), mountaineering on Mount Washington, and I have recently taken on marathon running—perhaps a triathlon in my future? ■

## Sam A. Merabi, DMD, MPH



Current Residence: **Worcester**  
Hometown: **Bala Cynwyd, PA**  
Office Location: **Leominster**  
Specialties: **General Dentistry and International Public Health Dentistry**  
Dental Education: **Tufts University School of Dental Medicine and Harvard School of Public Health**

### What do you like about being a dentist?

I enjoy engaging with the public and addressing oral health concerns with exciting new technology and evidence-based prevention strategies. Finding natural fluoride in well water in Malawi was just as exciting as the first time I used a laser in treatment.

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career thus far?

My biggest challenge is balancing a clinical practice locally with an international dental public health career. I have to keep all of that in mind when writing my grants and scheduling patients. The end result is fulfilling, and I think I have been able to keep things well organized.

### You've been very active in community health. Why did you decide to become involved in that sector?

The community is where health can first be addressed in macroscopic terms. Taking a step back from the mouth, you see the patient; take a second step back, you have the family; and then take one more step back, you have the community and its relationship to everything we are trying to do as providers. I especially gravitate to new immigrants, as they remind me of when my family and I first moved to the United States from Iran when I was a small boy.

### What inspired you to organize multiple trips to Africa to provide dental care there? Is this something you plan to continue in the future?

I always considered myself a "world citizen" and was inspired to work in Africa since I organized a trip to Zambia in dental school. Afterward, I studied international health when I got my MPH at Harvard. Working with Raising Malawi, Partners in Health, and Harvard School of Dental Medicine has been a dream. I plan to continue to be as effective as possible in the field of international oral health development and see where it takes me through my career.

### When you're not working, what do you do with your free time?

I love home renovation and hiking with the dogs. ■

## Medha Singh, DDS



Current Residence: **Newton**  
Hometown: **New Delhi, India**  
Office Location: **Boston**  
Specialty: **Periodontics**  
Dental Education: **Government Dental College, India (DDS); Tufts University School of Dental Medicine (DMD, Certificate of Advanced Education in Periodontics, and Master of Science)**

### Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

My parents are physicians, and I grew up in an environment where medical profession-related discussion and activities were present in everyday life. Going with my parents to their workplace was always exciting to me. These early experiences developed my interest in the medical profession. During high school, as I thought of career options that could afford me a balance in professional and personal life, dentistry became more appealing to me than medicine as I thought it could better provide me with that balance.

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career thus far?

The biggest challenge that I faced was moving from India to the United States after completing my dental training in India. Moving to a new environment and being thousand of miles away from my parents, siblings, and friends was really tough and challenging.

### You are very involved in dental education and are currently enrolled in the Faculty Track DMD Program at TUSDM. What led you to become involved in the education side of dentistry, and where do you see your future in dental education?

I grew up in India in a family that places a high value on education; my relatives on both sides of my parents' families are highly educated. My grandfather, who grew up in a village in British colonial India, studied law in the top-ranked college in the country and then went on to become governor of a state in India. This environment fed me with a highly inspiring outlook on life and the crucial role higher education plays. As a result, I developed my commitment to higher education. Working with various faculties at Tufts only stoked my drive further. I enjoy academics because it allows me to combine my clinical and research interests, and I just love teaching. For the future, I envision myself achieving tenure track with a focus on teaching and clinical research, and at the same time practicing periodontics.

### You are a board member of the nongovernmental organization Chaupal, which provides free medical and dental care in a village in India. How did you become involved with this organization?

Chaupal, which in Hindi language stands for a place of gathering in a village, is a not-for-profit organization based in India. My father is the founder and president of Chaupal. About 70 percent of the people in India live in rural areas with minimal access to medical and dental care. Being a physician himself, my father decided to start this not-for-profit organization. My siblings and I assisted him in planning and launching this organization. Every week, he and his team of 15 doctors—each a specialist in their own field—organize medical camps in the villages of National Capital Region in India. I visit India every year during my vacation and work with him and his team of doctors in these camps. Currently, I am working on expanding opportunities for my colleagues and friends here in the States to be able to participate and contribute to Chaupal's mission. ■

## Parul Taneja, DMD, MS



Current Residence: **Boston**  
Hometown: **New Delhi, India**  
Office Locations: **Chelsea, Waltham, and Lynn**  
Specialty: **Orthodontics**  
Dental Education: **Manipal University, Karnataka, India (BDS); Boston University Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine (DMD); and University of Oklahoma (Certificate in Orthodontics and MS in Oral Biology)**

### What do you like about being a dentist?

The one thing that makes being an orthodontist unequivocally likeable is the patient demographic, which ranges from 8 to 18 years (in spite of the recent increase in adults), as they function like a time machine that prevents you from becoming obsolete. They keep you informed about everything new, from trends to social opinions, and in the process, they minimize the much-dreaded generation gap. The confidence that a radiant smile instills in a person very often transforms his or her perspective on life. Besides all the fun mechanics, being instrumental in this transformation is what makes me want to go to work.

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career thus far?

One experience that is indelible was finding patients for the licensure exam—something I faced both in India and the United States. I remember looking for decay for an ideal Class II preparation in dozens and dozens of mouths. I looked in automobile garages, in schools, at Morse Fishing and Co. on Washington Street in Boston, at Supercuts on Boylston Street. This remains, to date, to be the content of some vivid nightmares of mine.

### You opened your own practice four years after graduating from dental school. What can you tell us about that experience?

Opening a practice was thrilling. It involved a lot of lists for tasks like getting workers' compensation insurance and ordering equipment. It was a liberating experience for personal expression. We chose everything, from the X-ray equipment to the color of the Post-it notes on the front desk—although micro-managing to that degree may not be recommended. The most challenging part of the process was establishing efficient systems that would ensure smooth running of the practice.

### What advice would you give to other dentists considering opening their own practices?

Opening a practice is not for the fainthearted. It is an exciting and sometimes trying process that requires a significant investment financially and timewise. It is important to hire experts as needed. For example, there is no substitute for a good lawyer who will examine contracts in order to protect your present and future interests. Hiring intelligently is vital to the success of any venture.

### Does being married to a dentist help you find a balance between your professional and personal lives?

A good balance requires a couple to share the same priorities personally and support each other's growth professionally. For two dentists, it is no different. It does have the fringe benefit of our being able to cover for one another if one person is unwell or has a study club. We have a toddler, so at the moment, attending meetings is a big juggling act for us. We share babysitting duties and sometimes one of us has to sacrifice listening to a favorite speaker. ■

## Miguel Vidal, DMD



Current Residence: **Boston**  
Hometown: **Miami, FL**  
Office Locations: **Boston and Winchester**  
Specialty: **Prosthodontics**  
Dental Education: **University of Pennsylvania and University of North Carolina**

### Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

My initial attraction to dentistry was due in great part to my family ties to the profession. While in college, I fractured my jaw pitching in a baseball game. After recovering from that trauma, I realized dentistry had what I was looking for in a profession, and here I am today.

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career thus far?

The fact that I am not from New England and did not attend any of the local schools for my training was an obstacle. As a specialist, I needed to work hard to earn the trust of the referring doctors and establish new relationships. On the positive side, I have formed some great friendships as a result of this experience.

### In addition to maintaining a private practice in Winchester, you are the staff prosthodontist at Massachusetts General Hospital. What are the challenges of working in these two different environments?

For me, it offers the best of both worlds. I have the office in Boston at a world-renowned institution where I treat patients who present with varying degrees of difficulty. The office in Winchester is a well-established restorative practice with a fantastic staff that takes great pride in caring for each patient. Being able to delegate responsibilities has eased the burden of not being in one physical location the entire week. It's not a situation for everyone, but I would not trade it.

### You are a national lecturer on prosthodontics and implant dentistry and hold a faculty position at Harvard School of Dental Medicine. Do you see yourself continuing to pursue a career in dental education?

I very much enjoy the education aspect, and it is something that I hope to continue. Through my position at MGH, I am involved with the Harvard-Wide General Practice Residency Program from a clinical and didactic standpoint. My role has evolved over the years to where currently I oversee the implant training for the dental residents. I was fortunate to have mentors who were very approachable and giving of their time. I feel it is my responsibility to do the same.

### Between your lecturing and teaching commitments, as well as maintaining a practice, how do you find a balance between your professional and personal lives?

This is something that I think we all find challenging. There never seems to be enough time during the week to accomplish everything. It takes an enormous amount of time and energy to grow a practice. Work does not stop for me after I have seen the last patient for the day. Having a great support team, especially with a young family, makes things more manageable. I am very fortunate to have support from my wife. Since she is also in the dental field, she understands what is involved from a time-commitment standpoint. We have worked hard on coordinating our work schedules and maximizing quality time at home. ■