

TEN UNDER 10

2008

Since 2005, the JOURNAL OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DENTAL SOCIETY, in conjunction with the MDS Standing Committee on the New Dentist, has highlighted 10 MDS member dentists who have been in the profession for 10 years or less—the “Ten Under 10.”

This year, the fourth year, is no different. On the following pages, you will meet the 2008 Ten Under 10 and learn more about their thoughts on organized dentistry, the challenges they faced when they first joined the profession, how they balance their professional and personal lives, and more.

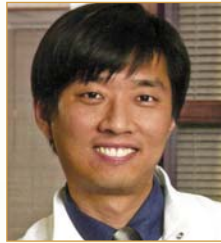
To qualify for selection for the Ten Under 10, dentists must have graduated from dental school in the past 10 years and have made a significant contribution to the profession, their community, or organized dentistry. A call for nominations was sent to MDS member dentists in the fall (nominees are required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

Congratulations to the 2008 Ten Under 10—the future of professional dentistry.



Gregory An, DDS, MPH

Residence: Waltham
Office Locations: Peabody and Cambridge
Specialty: General Dentistry
Education: University of Michigan School of Dentistry; Harvard School of Dental Medicine; and Harvard School of Public Health



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

I never visited the dentist as a young child. Our family had recently immigrated to the United States and had limited financial resources. It wasn't until a toothache as a young teenager that I saw a dentist for the first time. This experience left several impressions. I realized that most of the treatment rendered could have been prevented and that the cost of care was high. I learned what it felt like to be on the receiving side of dental procedures. My career has been shaped by these impressions and by a desire to discover ways to make the oral health care experience better for others.

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

Graduating school with loads of debt left me feeling pressured to pay it back as quickly as possible. I decided to commit part of my time to practicing in underserved communities and academics while spending the remaining time in a multispecialty practice. If I chose to work solely in a private practice, I could pay off my loans more quickly. But I knew that I would have to be happy with my choice, and my choice would have to fit my beliefs. It was the right choice.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

One memorable experience was receiving my first grant award from a private health care foundation. The grant was used to implement a program that would address disparities in health among ethnic minority groups. The award gave me a sense of affirmation and validation for the work I was doing.

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

The field of dentistry is constantly evolving. I noticed some of the things I learned in dental school in lectures and textbooks were outdated by the time I graduated. It really is necessary to keep yourself updated on the literature.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I still struggle with balancing the two. However, I feel incredibly fortunate to have a supportive wife. With her help, I have found that carving out time away from work allows me to pursue my hobbies, travel, spend time with my family, and gain a fresh perspective.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Doing what I do today: mentoring, teaching, and practicing in private and community settings. Wherever I am in 10 years, I hope that I will continue to be a positive influence in the lives I come across. ■

Ekaterini Antonellou, DMD, MS

Residence: Natick
Office Locations: Boston and Cambridge
Specialty: Prosthodontics
Education: University of Athens in Greece; Tufts University School of Dental Medicine



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

I had always visualized myself in a health care profession because I enjoy helping people. Dentistry combines science and art as well as attention to detail, and it is very challenging as a career.

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

The biggest challenge when I began my teaching career at Tufts University was to teach students who, at the time, were not much younger than I was. Once I worked with them on clinical cases and instructed them in my courses, I was able to gain their respect and trust as a teacher.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

My biggest reward professionally was my promotion to director of clinical and preclinical fixed prosthodontics and the recognition of my services as a teacher from my students and my peers. I also enjoy meeting former students at dental meetings and learning how much they have progressed professionally. My biggest reward personally is having a great husband who supports me with my career, and two daughters (Irene, 7, and Ellie, 4) who patiently wait for Mommy to come home late when I teach the evening clinic sessions at Tufts.

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

I would advise them to always stand by their work ethics and get involved with their local and national dental societies so that they can give back to their profession. Also, it is always nice to come back and volunteer their services for teaching.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I was able to advance in my career with the help and support of my family, and not only my husband and daughters. My mother came over from Greece and helped me for a year and half with each child and took my children to Greece for two months when I had to study for my prosthodontics boards.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I truly enjoy teaching, so I think in 10 years I will probably still be teaching and seeing patients in an intramural private practice. I like the combination of providing services to both students and patients. The appreciation that I get back when I help a student or when I finish a challenging prosthodontics case makes me certain that I made the right decision when I joined this profession. ■

Todd Belf-Becker, DMD

Residence: Marblehead
Office Locations: Revere, Boston
Specialty: General Dentistry
Education: Tufts University School of Dental Medicine



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

I've been exposed to dentistry all my life; my father and grandfather are dentists. Seeing how much they enjoy their work clearly influenced me, but I was never pressured to choose this profession. I have many fond childhood memories of being in the family office and also attending Yankee Dental Congress, which was my first exposure to the dental community in general.

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

Sometimes patients—those older than I—would say that I seemed too young to be a dentist, so it was up to me to demonstrate that despite my relative youth, I was a highly professional practitioner. In other words, disproving an age bias some patients may have had was an early challenge.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

Nothing is as satisfying as making patients happy. I particularly enjoy the challenge of calming anxiety to make nervous patients more comfortable. Volunteering for the MDS is rewarding, as well, and working on the Mobile Access to Care (MAC) Van is a highlight, since it has such an immediate impact on children in need.

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

I can't imagine anyone is completely comfortable when first starting in private practice. What helped me immeasurably was finding a practice with experienced dentists whom I trust, who were happy to help and share their knowledge, and who were never impatient about answering any questions I may have had. Also, it's never too early to start with continuing education courses. Participation in your district societies, as well as in the MDS in general, is a great way to stay involved and also informed as to where the profession is going.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I find that one of the great parts of this career is that I don't take it home with me. I enjoy being at work, but I am able to keep home and work separate. Although I have to admit that at many dinners with family or friends, the conversation does veer toward teeth.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I see myself right where I am, continuing to learn, staying involved, and having fun with dentistry. ■

Jeffrey M. Casiglia, DMD, DMSc

Residence: Salem
Office Location: Salem
Specialty: General Dentistry
Education: University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine; Harvard School of Dental Medicine; Diplomate, American Board of Oral Medicine



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

I was premedicine in college, thinking I might go into neurosurgery. However, I started developing jaw pain and clicking, so I went to see an oral surgeon. When I told him I was premed, he asked, "Have you ever thought of doing this?" The rest, as they say, is history.

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

Finding the right associateship. When I first started, I ran into a few situations that were exploitative, or even abusive in one case. At one point, I questioned whether I would stay in dentistry. However, I eventually joined a terrific group on the Cape that turned everything around and led me to where I am today.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

From a personal standpoint, it would be owning and rehabilitating my own practice. I bought a practice that would have been considered "failed" about two years ago. Now, I have built it into something where the patients and staff are treated the best way I can. The practice is located in a historic building, which we have restored piece by piece. This kind of top-to-bottom involvement in the practice is truly gratifying. I'm grateful to still be involved in teaching. I think we all bear the responsibility of sharing what we know.

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

Get more training. And then . . . more training. Four years of dental school, in my opinion, is really not enough. Anyone who doesn't specialize should definitely do a GPR or an AEGD. If you go right into practice, find someone who will mentor you and who isn't interested in just getting a body in their practice so they can reduce their hours. Also, carefully consider your employment offers.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I don't have to. My wife is involved in my practice so we can talk shop if we have to. But somehow, we have always struck a good balance. I also vowed that I would never allow dentistry to out-prioritize family, and I have her to tell me if I do that.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Still practicing in Salem, as well as teaching and lecturing. I want to grow the oral medicine portion of my practice. Very few board certified oral medicine/oral pathology dentists are accessible in the private practice setting, and I am out to change that. ■

Sandra J. Crowley-Le, DMD

Residence: North Grafton
Office Location: Northborough
Specialty: General Dentistry
Education: Tufts University School of Dental Medicine



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

I must admit that dentistry was not my first career path. Previously, I had worked as a marine biologist and biomedical researcher. However, I am privileged to say that dentistry has, by far, been my most rewarding and fulfilling career choice. Dentistry allows me to combine my love of the medical field with the artistry of biological sciences while providing direct patient care.

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

At the start of my career, my biggest challenge was balancing patient care with practice management, and juggling in my personal life. You learn a lot very quickly through trial and error. I especially want to note that my mentor—now my business partner—has been extremely supportive of me.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

My greatest reward professionally has been my colleagues. I have been involved with organized dentistry since before graduation, and the resources available are great; however, the one-on-one contact with those whom I share this career is even better. My greatest reward personally is the ability to work with my patients, seeing how my skills can develop a new smile and return function to someone's life.

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

Dental school is not dentistry. You have only just begun when you walk out that door with a diploma. Take every CE course you can find and get involved with your community. You will learn quickly what you love and, because you love it, you will excel at it.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

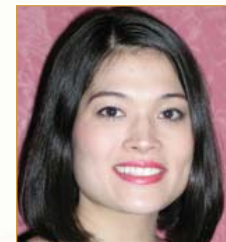
There will never be enough hours in the day for me to find the perfect balance. Something always has to give; it is choosing what and when that is the challenge for all of us. Life is too short to take yourself too seriously, and a good laugh helps keep you balanced.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

In 10 years I hope to be exactly where I am today. I love my practice, my patients, and what I do. I look forward to continuing to be involved in organizations within my profession and hope someday to be able to add the role of instructor to my accomplishments. One title I added to my list this past March was "Mommy," a role I couldn't wait to start. ■

Dara T. Cunnion, DMD

Residence: North Quincy
Office Location: Waltham
Specialty: Pediatric Dentistry
Education: Boston University Goldman School of Dental Medicine



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

The decision was difficult since I had already trained at the Royal Ballet School in London as a professional ballet dancer prior to attending Princeton University. Ballet was a great love of mine, but I wanted to make a contribution to society that would give me lifelong fulfillment and also could afford me the opportunity to teach students and work with children. So I turned down a contract with a ballet company in England and matriculated at Princeton with the goal of one day becoming a health care professional.

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

Fulfilling the responsibility of meeting your patients' needs and the expectations of their parents. It is an especially awesome responsibility taking care of a child. Earning a child patient's trust can be very challenging, but I cannot think of anything more rewarding.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

One of my mentors, Dr. John Caravolas, who has been in practice for more than 25 years, once said to me that the most rewarding aspect of pediatric dentistry is building lifelong relationships with your patients. Over the past six years or so that I have been practicing, I have found this to be so true. It is wonderful to be able to help parents and children prevent caries and other problems.

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

I would reiterate a piece of advice that one of my mentors, the late Dean Spencer Frankl, once gave to me: To be a successful dentist, you must be a lifelong learner. You should try to learn something every day. Always strive to be better. Find a mentor. Join a study group.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

It is very important to have a balance, but it is not always easy. Prioritizing is important because there is only a certain amount you can accomplish in your waking hours.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I hope that I would be doing more of what I am doing now: teaching dental students at BU; treating children in practice; contributing to the science of dental medicine through research; and volunteering and being involved in organizations such as the MDS and the Massachusetts Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. ■

Mary Jane Hanlon-Rogers, DMD

Residence: Lexington
Office Location: Lexington
Specialty: General Dentistry
Education: Forsyth School of Dental Hygiene; Tufts University School of Dental Medicine



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

I knew when I was 14 years old that I wanted to be a dentist. In high school, I told my guidance counselor (a male) and he responded “Oh no, dear, you want to be the hygienist!” Well, I didn’t want to be a hygienist, but just in case I couldn’t get into dental school, I applied to both. Then I severed the tendon in my right middle finger with a scalpel, which put me out of commission for 10 weeks, and they weren’t sure if I was going to have full use of the finger. So I opted for dental hygiene school. Fifteen years after graduating from dental hygiene school, I graduated from dental school.

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

I think the biggest challenge is finding the right staff for each position you have in your office. Finding the right person with the right attitude and work ethic is so important.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

I think the most rewarding experience is to look back on what you have developed and accomplished. Having patients compliment you for having such a friendly office or taking the time to write thank-you notes to you for work they appreciate is the most wonderful thing. You know that all your hard work is paying off.

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

I think the most prudent thing to do when you have no prior experience in dentistry or working in a practice is to do a residency or work in a very large practice where you will gain a lot of experience and have the benefit of experienced doctors to ask questions of. Do this for a minimum of two years, and then look for an established practice to purchase. Starting a practice from scratch has its benefits; however, it has its drawbacks, too.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I try to put my practice first during the week and my family first on the weekends. There are times when it doesn’t always work out well, but my family knows when Mom is happy, they are happy. So it is best to keep Mom happy!

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Realistically, I would like to be retired in 10 years having spent 20 years as a dentist and 15 years as a hygienist. I have many hobbies, including sports photography, that I would like to pursue. ■

Amelia Grabe Lane, DMD

Residence: Dennisport
Office Location: Chatham
Specialty: General Dentistry
Education: Boston University Goldman School of Dental Medicine



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

I had known since I was 7 years old that I wanted to become a doctor. I grew up in a small town in New Hampshire where my father is a general dentist. In high school, I determined I wanted to become a dentist because I wanted to have my own business. I knew dentistry would provide me with the independence that I desired.

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

I purchased my practice a few months after I graduated from dental school. I cannot stress how grateful and lucky I am that I had inherited a phenomenal team of women with the practice. These women were crucial in helping the patients adjust, as well as helping me to start building the practice I wanted. In addition, I have just started at the Pankey Institute to help me build a vision for my practice and to give me the skills to achieve it. And if not for my father’s advice and encouragement, I would never have been able to go straight into owning my own practice.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

My biggest reward has been starting to build roots as a valued member of my community. I feel the best way I have been able to do this is through volunteering, both on the Mobile Access to Care Van and through Rotary International. My goal is to build a foundation in organized dentistry that can be used to serve my community.

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

“Know what you know; know what you don’t know.” They call it the *practice* of dentistry because you will never know all there is to know, even when you’ve been practicing for 50 years. There is always something new to learn.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

It has taken me two years to get an idea as to how to do this, and I’m getting better at it every day. My primary rule has always been that weekends are sacred for personal life, and weekdays are for the professional life. But this rule is flexible.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I see myself continuing to build my practice into a cutting-edge dental practice focused on providing excellent patient care and expanding on the spa dentistry concept. I hope to have a family, and increase my leadership involvement in organized dentistry, and continue helping to make my community a better place. ■

Jennifer L. Nelson, DMD

Residence: Attleboro
Office Location: Attleboro
Specialty: General Dentistry
Education: University of Louisville
School of Dentistry



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

Dentistry really is the only profession I have ever thought of doing. I was introduced to it by my father, Dr. Philip J. Gregorio. My parents advised me to go to dental hygiene school. They knew I loved dentistry, but they wanted me to be sure I enjoyed working on patients. At the time, I wasn't happy to go into hygiene, but now I realize that the time spent as a hygienist has really helped me as a dentist.

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

The biggest challenge I had when I began my career was realizing how hard I was going to have to work to start paying off dental school debt. My situation is different from that of the normal graduate because I am married with two small children. After one year of working as an associate, I found a practice for sale in the same town in which we live. What I found out about buying an existing practice was that immediate income really helped me to make a decent income to pay my bills and live.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

The biggest reward I have had is the relationships with my staff and the community. I didn't know how the community would feel about a new dentist. It has been such a humbling experience to see my staff and patients have such faith in my abilities and me.

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

First, work where you want to live; don't live where you want to work. It is so important for our overall health to enjoy each day, and by living in a place you love, that is so much easier. Second, own your own practice. Just do it—and sooner rather than later. You will need to be up-to-speed on procedures so you can provide good dentistry at a reasonable rate of speed. Being an associate in a fast-paced environment for a year or two will help to achieve this.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

Balancing my professional and personal lives is easy, most of the time. I have to make my schedule fit my lifestyle. I also employ an associate dentist, which allows me to have expanded hours but still work the schedule that best suits me and my family.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I see myself continuing to work four days a week and having the office open six days a week. I really enjoy dentistry and can't see doing something else. ■

Thanh Trang Nguyen, DMD

Residence: Holbrook
Office Location: Statewide mobile dental program
Specialty: General Dentistry
Education: Tufts University School of Dental Medicine; Lutheran Medical Center



Why did you choose dentistry as a career?

Having grown up in Vietnam, where oral health does not get the attention that it deserves, I appreciate the importance placed on the healthiness and esthetics of teeth. Here in the United States, I saw the array of possibilities that dentistry could achieve, ranging from relieving pain to raising self-esteem by brightening a smile.

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

I arrived in the United States in 1991 as a political refugee. I started dental school in 1998 and my professional career in 2002. I found language to be my biggest obstacle. Not knowing a word of English before arriving in the United States, I had trouble learning the conversational vocabulary, not to mention the medical terms. In a career in which patient care is so important, I wanted to make sure that I had good listening skills to understand patients' needs and verbal skills to provide clear instructions to the patients.

What has been the biggest reward you have experienced since you left dental school?

I get a very strong sense of fulfillment whenever a patient gets up from my dental chair with less pain or more confidence than when he or she entered the clinic.

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

One of the best professional decisions I made was to commit to the advanced education in general dentistry (AEGD). My advice for graduating students would be to not rush into practicing, but rather to take the time to deepen their knowledge and strengthen their skills through advanced education. Knowledge and skills are an important foundation, and it would be wise to start building on it earlier in their career.

How do you balance your professional and personal lives?

I am very fortunate to have a flexible working schedule. In performing mobile dentistry, I am able to design a schedule that allows me to have both a career and a meaningful personal life. Time is a limited commodity for us all, and I find that managing time alone is not enough; managing my energy is important as well. I make sure that I have enough energy to focus on the activity at hand by keeping myself healthy through a balanced diet, regular exercise, and a healthy dosage of community work.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

In 10 years, I would like to have my own well-established practice. ■