



## Behind the Smiles

Noor Ali Najam

**An interview with Dr Evgeny Kushnerev, Senior Clinical Lecturer in Dentistry at the University of Manchester.**

### Abstract

First-year Biomedical Science student Noor Ali Najam sat down with Dr Evgeny Kushnerev to get an insight into the career and explore various pathways within dentistry. They discussed the difficulties dentists face throughout dental school. Noor came to the conclusion that the transition from dental school to working as a dentist is not as easy as most people think. However, she is still aiming to pursue this career path, as she is someone who thoroughly enjoys challenges and has the capability to work calmly under pressure. Read on to find out what Noor and Dr Kushnerev discussed.

### **Tell me about your career journey, starting from choosing your career pathway, and why did you choose dentistry?**

My mother was a nurse, and I was almost certain from a very young age that I wanted to work in healthcare in the future. I originally wanted to study medicine but rather preferred pursuing dentistry due to the surgical aspects of it. I found dentistry more hands-on and engaging. I was accepted to study dentistry in 2005 at Moscow State University of Medicine and Dentistry.

### **What kept you motivated throughout dental school?**

I enjoyed my years in dental school despite of it being a longer-than-usual course. I maintained my work-life balance by going out with my friends. My friends and I would go to the cinema, park and occasionally even nightclubs. I spent time outside the university doing things I enjoyed like playing the piano and taking violin lessons. I did not stop doing things I enjoyed whilst being in the dental school which helped me manage my professional life without it taking a toll on my well-being. I even invited my friends as my patients in my later years of dental school. Moscow is a large city, and my placements were scheduled in different hospitals around the city. I enjoyed working in various parts of the city. I used to take the metro in my initial years of university to avoid traffic, which left me with extra time before class. I productively spent this extra time in the library reading before my lectures.

### **What would you do differently if you could go back in time while making a career choice?**

Initially, I wanted to become a pathologist, but things did not work as planned. However, I always wanted to become an academically related clinician. I am now a senior lecture consultant, and my role includes managing PBL sessions and supervising several Masters and PhD students on Stem Cell Research. Additionally, my duties involve clinical teaching undergraduate and graduate dental students.

When I first moved to England, I sat an exam which I failed at the time. It had financial implications hence I had to return to Russia and work in a private practice. I was working in a senior position which enhanced my leadership qualities. It is a key transferable skill so in hindsight, everything worked out well and I now have my dream job. I would not change my journey because it exactly led me to where I always wanted to be.

### **What motivated you to do an MSc and how did you make that decision for yourself?**

I always wanted to study further so after I graduated from dental school, I was looking at places to study further. I was keen on getting an offer from England as my partner at the time had also moved to London. I was drawn towards Manchester as it was not as expensive as compared to London and the University of Manchester had the programme I was interested in. I went on to study an MSc in Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery following successful completion, I enrolled to do a PhD degree in the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery in the Blond McIndoe Laboratory.

### **What qualities make a good dentist?**

My first answer would be resilience. We are all humans, and even as dentists we need to let things go. Showing compassion, empathy, honesty, and sympathy are qualities expected from a good dentist.

### **Do you think there are any drawbacks to dentistry as a career?**

Dentistry can be challenging, especially for newly qualified dentists who take criticism personally. Patients leaving unhappy can be challenging to overlook. Increased workload makes it difficult to meet required targets which affects performance. Due to the increased NHS load, there is less one-to-one consulting time. Dentistry can be especially tough when students are not fully aware of the required roles and expectations. The suicide rate among dentists is very high due to the constant pressure and competition.

### **What is expected from a dentist whose peer is being dishonest?**

The good thing to do is to have a private conversation with the individual and de-escalate the matter quickly. Try and talk to your colleagues and put things in the right direction. Double-check before involving higher authority. We are all humans and misunderstandings are uncommon in any workplace.

### **You have published an article about wrong-site surgery, what are the consequences of wrong-site surgery?**

In the rare case of wrong-site surgery, patients are informed immediately. No single individual is blamed. A chain of events leads to wrong-site surgery. Further training and discussion take place. The patient is given the chance to complain or even request for compensation.

### **You are currently researching the isolation and differentiation of adult dental pulp-derived stem cells, what is a regular day like during your research period?**

Every day is different in research. Research is pretty much independently managing work rather than having a uniform timetabled schedule. We are expected to come up with a proposal, apply for grants, attend conferences, and read articles. The clinical side of my career is with similar if not the same tasks. I get the best of both worlds, which is why I like my job.

**Do you have an experience in the admission panel? What would you advise all aspiring dentists?**

I was an examiner for medicine, dentistry, and physician associate. I am a MMI examiner and the best way to get around the interview questions is to listen to the question carefully and do not beat around the bush. The quality of your answer is marked rather than the quantity. I recommend studying a basic degree before studying dentistry because I find mature students have an easier time throughout dental school.

**How do dentists become a member of societies like the International Association for Dental Research (IADR), Association of British Academic Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (ABAOMS) and International Society for the Study of Surrealism (ISSS)?**

I joined ISSS because of my leisure interest in oil painting. Dentists sign up with different societies as per their interest in a specific field of work. Joining societies is beneficial in building networks, getting funds, and attending conferences. Joining some societies may require a joining fee however it is beneficial in the long run.