Interview: "There has been tremendous growth in access to knowledge and technology..."

By Kinga Mollov, DIWMA

Interview with Dr. David Donelson, an American educated and trained General Dentist with 10 years’ experience in General and Esthetic Dentistry. Dr. David is an expert in digital smile design. He is also a Platinum Invisalign provider and certified using Inman Aligner teeth straightening methods.

Dr. David, tell us about your background and your experience as a dentist?

Originally, I hail from the deep south of the United States, Atlanta, GA. I graduated from UMASS Amherst with a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration in 2003. I then proceeded to stay in Massachusetts to spend another 4 years at Tufts School of Dental Medicine in Boston, where I learned my DMD in 2009. An alternative track taken by some dental graduates in the USA is to complete a General Practice Residency or Advanced Education in General Dentistry program to further expand on the knowledge gained from dental school. I was accepted into a 1 year certificate AEGD program at the University of Florida College of Dentistry in 2009. At the time they had an extensive implant program teaching comprehensive full mouth dentistry.

I remained in Jacksonville, FL after the program and jumped right into private practice as a solo practitioner for several years. Life circumstances moved me to New York City where I began working part time in several different offices and also as Part Time Clinical Faculty at NYU Dental School.

In 2012, I had thought about potentially looking for work in KSA with Saudi Arabia but it never gained any traction. I began speaking to a fellow Tufts Alumni who had been living in Dubai for several years. She put me in touch with her employer who I subsequently had a Skype call with shortly after. One month later I was on a one-way flight with two suitcases halfway around the world to somewhere I had never been before.

Within my move to Dubai I have spent time employed with Dr’s Nicolas and Asep and Dr Michael’s Dental Clinic before accepting the role as Head of the Dental Department at Valiant Clinic in 2016.

In 2015, I passed my fellowship exam for the American Academy of General Dentistry. This was a huge step for me in that only 6% of dentists in the US obtain this status. It requires 200 hours of CE and success at a very difficult 250 question standardized test reflecting all disciplines of general dentistry.

Tell us please about the Valiant Clinic and what treatments are available for the patients?

Valiant Clinic is a premium, multi-specialty outpatient clinic offering world class diagnostic and wellness services. The physicians and allied health professionals provide evidence-based care following international standards of excellence. They encourage healthy living and increased awareness about early detection and diagnosis for all of their patients. The Clinic is regarded for providing Essential and Premier Check-ups designed as you would get in the U.S. It is affiliated with Houston Methodist Global Health Care Services, the international arm of the world-renowned Houston Methodist Hospital, located in Houston, Texas, USA, and brought to Dubai by Meraas.

In addition to all facets of General Dentistry, we have an American hygienist heading up our hygiene department. We also have an Oral Surgeon on staff to provide all forms of Maxillofacial Surgery including having procedures done under General Anaesthesia in our own Operating Theatres.

How being a dentist in UAE compares to the US?

Dentistry in the UAE is remarkably similar to the USA. The ADA has modelled itself in many ways after an American model. The use of the ADA coding system, albeit we are still using coding from 2008, was a very easy transition for me. Most of the materials and suppliers in the US are represented in some form or fashion in the UAE.

A large difference practicing in the US compared to the UAE is the difference in educational backgrounds and philosophies reflected by clinicians from so many different countries. The 66 CODA accredited dental schools in the US all have the same requirements in regards to the standard of care and competency.

What would you advise for anyone wanting to practice in UAE?

My advice for anyone wanting to practice in the UAE would be to clearly define what their job expectations are and what they require to be fulfilled and happy. There are such huge differences in jobs here that encompass substantially different salaries, different patient demographics, different quality of facilities and different patient management philosophies. It’s important to be aware of the labor laws and the nuances of what is usual and customary with regards to contracts for their particular specialty. I would also recommend to have a portfolio of work to show prospective employers. Pictures speak volumes about the quality of work and what a clinician is capable of. Get a camera and start taking pictures now!

What is your take on dentistry in the Middle East?

To me dentistry in the Middle East still has time to grow and learn from more established markets like Europe and America. There has been tremendous growth in access to knowledge and technology in the time I have been here. I anticipate it becoming more similar than different as we move forward with dental technology. There is much better adoption by more clinicians of new technology in this region which I feel will help it become an epicenter for new techniques.

Thank you very much for the interview.