



People in focus

Stars of aesthetic dentistry: Dr Shameek Popat

Triple Smile Award winner **Shameek Popat** talks to Versha Miyanger about his love of cosmetic dentistry and how he achieved success at the very highest level

VM: Firstly, congratulations on being a winner three times over at this year's Smile Awards...

SP: I was really happy being shortlisted looking at the calibre of dentists in the shortlist. To win three awards was fantastic. I had just flown in from Seattle that afternoon and was not sure if I would make the awards but was very glad I made it. These awards felt special as they are not awards for how beautiful your practice is or whether you offer Cappuccino or ten different types of herbal tea with a foot massage but actually judged on clinical work by your peers. It was a great sense of personal achievement. It's great for the team that I work with and your patients like to see that you are passionate about your dentistry. It also means I have just raised the bar for myself for next year!!

There are many people I would like to thank, but above all, I am grateful to my patients. They are the reason I remain motivated and enthused about dentistry. It is because of such lovely patients that I have been able to perform the kind of level of dentistry that I have done so far and I hope I can continue to carry on doing so.

VM: What or who made you choose dentistry as a profession?

Well, being Indian I had a choice between Medicine, Dentistry or Accountancy! My brother and I lived with my remarkable uncle and aunt in Stockport, whilst studying for our then 'O' levels and 'A' levels. My uncle is a successful dentist enjoying his work and probably was the biggest influence on my brother and I choosing dentistry as our career choice. So I would like to thank him and my amazing parents for making a lot of sacrifices and putting in a lot of hard work to put us through dental school. However, it's ironic that both my uncle's sons have chosen totally different careers!

VM: Where and when did you qualify and what training have you undertaken apart from your university education?

SP: I qualified from Guy's Hospital in 1993 and I did my MFGDP in 1998. I am a bit of a course junkie and have probably seen most of the big

speakers/teachers. I have finished eight out of the nine Kois Modules at the Kois Center in Seattle, hopefully finishing it in August and becoming the third UK graduate. Amongst some of the many courses I have done were with John Cranham, Paul Tipton, Roy Higson, Harry Sidlesky, Didier Dietschi and Larry Rosenthal, who are all great speakers. These guys are what I call my shortcuts. They help me make my journey effective and efficient. They have helped me become a chess player rather than a chess piece. These guys are the grand masters who I have learned from. Look around you and you will see that the winners in financial, personal, and spiritual endeavours all use excellent shortcuts. They use shortcuts so they can become shortcuts themselves*.

VM: Why did you decide to concentrate on aesthetics?

SP: I try and do all aspects of dentistry but aesthetics is the most fun as it is want-based dentistry rather than need-based dentistry. It's great providing a patient with what they desire. Seeing their faces turn to delight when they look in the mirror for the first time at your results. Their bright smiles, hugs and even sometimes tears of joy make all the hard work worthwhile. To quote Mother Teresa, 'Every time you smile at someone it is an action on love, a gift to that person and a beautiful thing'.

VM: Apart from practising dentistry, you are also lecturing and have numerous other responsibilities – how do you manage your workload and balance work and family life?

SP: Badly. It is so difficult getting the work/life balance right. While professionally when the opportunities come you have to grasp them. This should be ideally done whilst you are young enough and keen enough to make good use of them. You do not want to regret not taking them when you had the chance. To get anywhere in life you have to work hard and to get better, you have to work harder than the next person – let no one fool you that it is an easy journey. On the other hand your kids grow up so quickly, and in a blink of an eye, one of your twins has just



lost her first tooth! But I make sure I get back every night to read them a bedtime story and kiss them goodnight. I try and get away with the wife and kids as often as possible to spend some quality time with them.

I am also trying to find some time for health and fitness by doing boxing and badminton. Unfortunately, there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything. Something wins, something loses – usually sleep!

VM: What is the most satisfying aspect of your work?

SP: Seeing the person that comes in that smiles with their lips closed or hand in front of their face, leave with a beaming smile that travels to the eyes and is full of confidence. Or the nervous patient that goes away 'wowed' by their pleasant dental experience.

I am also enjoying being an instructor/mentor with CCADS. We are in the middle of a hands on Aesthetic and Restorative continuum at the moment. It is nerve-racking and stressful, but great fun and a new adventure for me.

In addition I try and do something for charity every year. In previous years I have trekked



Jemal Toubkal in North Africa in torrential rain for Dentaaid, sponsored an eye camp in India with my brother last year and this year I am doing the 'The Crumball Rally' from France to Italy in a clapped out banger for Healing little Hearts Charity.

VM: What is your favourite type of Dentistry?

SP: Comprehensive dentistry that involves interdisciplinary planning with my orthodontist, periodontist and oral surgeon and coming up with a great treatment plan that can change a person's life. It's great fun brainstorming a practical treatment plan in accordance with the patient's wishes. The key to successful and predictable dentistry starts with the comprehensive exam, thoughtful planning and a commitment to give your best.

VM: What is the most popular treatment you offer?

SP: I am a big fan of E-max Inlays, Onlays and Crowns, so do end up doing a lot of those but we do everything. From the simple bread and butter stuff to complex cases. I actually love seeing families come together for their re-care appointments and seeing the children grow up and hopefully they will do the same for their children. There is a lot to be said for traditional family dentistry. It is not all about glamour and white smiles.

VM: You are a member of the AACD – what do you find different about dentistry in the States compared to over here?

SP: They love their white straight teeth and have no problems prepping teeth, while we are more into natural looking teeth and tend to be more cautious when prepping teeth. But, to be honest it's more about managing the different patient expectations here and there. Furthermore, we tend to do more ortho, whitening and bonding now or at least I do! But on the whole, when talking to US dentists, they have the same problems, the same issues and the same gripes that we have. The grass is never greener...

VM: What is your opinion on facial aesthetics treatments such as Botox, dermal fillers, facial rejuvenation etc and should we really all strive for a 'perfect' face?

SP: Quite a few of us need all the help we can get! I do not have problems with the treatments, as long as it is carried out by a properly qualified, well-trained practitioner. I do think there needs to be more regulation for these treatments and proper qualifications with exams. Rather than a perfect face, it's probably nicer to tweak or enhance what you already have. You have to remember the ultimate happiness is not through these treatments but from within in yourself or with the people you surround yourself with. But these treatments and aesthetic dentistry can make you feel good, give you self-confidence and make you less self-conscious which is all good!

VM: Professionally, what are you most proud of?

SP: Building up a beautiful, busy and successful practice with a great team. I am also going to be very proud, when I finish the ninth and final module at the Kois Center and take my mentor exams. I loved winning the three Smile Awards as well.

VM: What has been your biggest challenge?

SP: Getting the right team. It takes time, effort and money, but it is great when you have a loyal, reliable team that you can trust. Learning business skills which has been a real challenge for me! Furthermore, making sacrifices with my family time to go on courses and working far too hard!

VM: What has been your biggest mistake?

SP: Not starting my journey early enough. I was too happy in my box!! I wish I had heard Larry Rosenthal and John Kois speak earlier.

VM: What do you think is the future of aesthetic dentistry?

SP: As Max Eastman said, 'A smile is the universal welcome'. As long as people love to smile, aesthetic dentistry will have a part to play.

FACT FILE

Trained:

Guy's Hospital, London

Practice:

Rosebank Dental Practice, Chorleywood, Hertfordshire

Lives:

Chorleywood, Hertsfordshire with wife and 3 children – twin girls aged 6 and a 4-year-old boy.

Books I'm Reading:

Be a Shortcut – Fast track to Business Success by Scott Halford and Emperor by Conn Iggulden

Professional Interest

Comprehensive Dentistry, which involves a true bridging of all the dental disciplines - oral surgery, orthodontics, endodontics, restorative/cosmetic and periodontics

Other Interests:

Reading, travelling, football, cricket and skiing

What would you be if you were not a dentist?:

A professional cricketer

VM: What are your top tips in maintaining a successful aesthetic practice?

SP: 'Without romance and vision, a business has no soul, no spirit to motivate its people to achieve something great.' Howard Schultz

Get some mentors. Find someone who inspires you, teaches you, motivates you and encourages you. They are your shortcuts to success. Mine are John Kois from the US, Ken Harris and Ian Buckle in the UK. **A**

*About Shortcuts

People will judge your abilities based on primarily on what you can do for them; but a close second is how you make them feel when you demonstrate your abilities. If you excel in an array of skills that are needed by other people, who generally do not want to or cannot complete the tasks / skills themselves, you become valuable. If then, you complete these tasks with a high degree of excellence, you become highly paid. And if you do these tasks for a lot of people, you become influential. Finally, if you master these skills and perform them with grace and a high degree of professionalism you become powerful.