

Dr. Erin Watson - Choosing and Doing a Residency Program Full Conversation

Dr. O'Keefe: So, today I'm speaking with Dr. Erin Watson, she's a hospital dentist based in Toronto, and she has a unique perspective and experience with residency programs for newly graduated dentists. Erin, would you just give us a little bit of your background, where you graduated, your experience doing a residency and how you interact with residents today?

Dr. Watson: Sure. So, as John mentioned, my name is Erin Watson. I graduated from McGill University in Montreal and then I immediately went on to complete a hospital dental residency at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, Ontario. It was a really fantastic experience and as part of my year there, I had the opportunity to rotate for a week at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. I ended up getting hired at Princess Margaret out of my residency and gradually transitioned from being partially in private practice firstly at Princess Margaret and partially at another hospital to become full time at Princess Margaret. As part of my role here, we do supervise the residents from Mount Sinai Hospital. So over the past years they previously used to come and spend a week with us, now they spend two weeks with us. So, I do get to spend quite a bit of time with the residents in my current role.

Dr. O'Keefe: Now let's go back to you being a resident. What attracted you to apply for and take a residency program?

Dr. Watson: Part of it was definitely that I wanted to get some more experience because having left dental school, for whatever reason, I had not had much experience extracting teeth and I did think that I was potentially interested in going into oral surgery. So, I knew that Sinai has a good oral surgery program and that if I potentially wanted to apply there in the future, it might make sense to come there as a resident first. So, I came as a resident then accidentally fell in love with what they were doing over at Princess Margaret and decided to forgo any plans to try and go into oral surgery. So that was, I would say my main driver. It seemed like I'd be meeting the right people for my future career goals and my goals ended up switching partway through the year.

Dr. O'Keefe: Now, what's a typical day in the life of a resident from your memory and experience of it?

Dr. Watson: So, from what I remember, it was, you know, not unreasonable hours. I think we were there from about 8:00 to 5:00 every day. Usually you would be in clinic, sometimes you'd be in the emergency room seeing patients, sometimes you'd be on rotation, perhaps with oral surgery or with ENT. And then of course just seeing general dental patients in the dental clinic. We would sometimes stay after hours to work on our clinic notes and make sure that they were acceptable. And then there was usually seminars in the evening about once a

week. And then of course if you're on call, your day can look a lot different. So, we used to take one in every sixth call—and it is overnight call—so sometimes you'd be going in in the middle of the night and seeing patients. And we had a nice little room where we could sleep and I'd pull a warm blanket from the emerge and wrap myself up and that helped me go to bed. So, on the days where you're on call, like you'd be quite different, and you'd never really know what to expect. But other than that, the hours are quite reasonable.

Dr. O'Keefe: What did you like best about being a resident?

Dr. Watson: That's a good question. At the time I probably would have said my co-residents. I really liked my co-residents. We all got along quite well and it was really nice meeting dentists at similar stages of their career who had come from various different institutions and kind of recognizing that even though we maybe did things a little bit differently or used a slightly different language, that we all kind of, we're doing the same thing but that we could learn from each other. Now in retrospect, I would probably say that the connections that I was able to make with various specialists and various other hospital-based providers have been extremely useful to me in my present role.

Dr. O'Keefe: If I was to ask you to give some nuggets of advice to young colleagues who are thinking of applying for taking a residency, what would be the top bits of advice you'd dispense?

Dr. Watson: I would definitely recommend that you do your homework about where you're going to go. I think that it's a bit difficult in, you know, late third year or early fourth year of dental school to really know where you think you want to end up. But if you have a bit of an idea, choosing a residency program as tailored to that I think is very smart. Understanding that you're probably going to make connections and have greater job opportunities in the area where in the region where you do the residency. So, probably trying to pick somewhere that you think maybe you might want to live in the future is not unreasonable. And you know, I would, I would encourage most people to do a residency program. I recognize that not everyone can, but the amount of experience that you gain in here is really incredible and I came out of that year so much more confident than I would have been had I just been coming out of dental school.

Dr. O'Keefe: Did you apply to many places yourself?

Dr. Watson: As a resident? I did. I applied to, because I'd been at McGill, I applied to all the residency programs affiliated with McGill. I applied to Sunnybrook, to Mount Sinai. I didn't apply to sick kids because I knew that pediatric dentistry wasn't for me. And then I also applied to Western as well.

Dr. O'Keefe: Erin, thank you very much for taking time – just like Colombo – have you any final bit of advice to give to our listeners?

Dr. Watson: The only last thing that I would say is that if you do choose to go into a residency or whatever you choose to do to make sure that you present yourself with your best foot forward and with the right attitude. People who show up to work positive and in a good mood are going to be well received and the dental is quite small. So, when you come out of a residency, if you've made a fantastic impression, people are going to hear about you and there's going to be a lot of good news going on, but the inverse may also be true. So, I would just, you know, try to keep that in mind and to try and always put your best foot forward.

Dr. O'Keefe: Dr. Erin Watson, thank you very much for taking time to give us advice today.

Dr. Watson: Always a pleasure, John.