

Dr. Rafael Figueiredo – Dental Public Health Specialist

Dr. O'Keefe: Today, I welcome Dr. Rafael Figueiredo and he's the provincial Dental Public Health Officer with Alberta Health Services and he's going to talk to us about what it's like to work as a dental public health specialist for a provincial government agency. [Rafael just first to get the conversation going. Give us a little bit of a background, your professional journey today.

Dr. Figueiredo: Yeah, definitely. So, I'm originally from Brazil where I did my undergrad at the dental school with the Sao Paulo University in Brazil. And right after my graduation, I had my private dental clinic in, but also, I was working on a dental public health team, mainly delivering services to special needs patients, children and adults. What is a vulnerable group of the population everywhere in the world. After I moved to Canada, I started to work at the University of Toronto as a research assistant at the community dental health services research unit. And the, when I was there, I did my master where I finished in 2011 and right after I finished this master, I got into the dental public health specialty degree that gave me the certification as a dental public health specialist with the Royal College of Dentists of Canada in 2014. And after that, I got the position here in Alberta as a dental public health officer for the province and I am here and a happy working in dental public health field.

Dr. O'Keefe: Why did you do the specialty program?

Speaker 2: Dental public health was always my passion. As I mentioned, since my graduation, I was working with vulnerable population, advocating dental care to patients with special needs. But at the same time, I was always looking to a big picture, how could I make a difference at the population level? In Canada, when I was working as a researcher at UofT, I had the opportunity to know the Canadian dental care system that is totally different from the one that I was used to. And to be aware of vulnerable groups of the population here in Canada that I thought I didn't know that a first-world country, you know, also had vulnerable groups of the population. And with all the knowledge that I gained at UofT, working in research, came the motivation and excitement to keep working with the vulnerable groups of the population. And it was when I decided to do the dental public health specialty program and pursue my passion. I had work in many research projects, but one that I am most proud of was my research project for the specialty program when I evaluate the oral health status of the homeless population in Toronto. That is a research project that I was very proud of.

Dr. O'Keefe: I can hear through everything you say passion and pride are so important for any professional pathway.

Dr. Figueiredo: You are absolutely right.

Dr. O'Keefe: Now, I'll bet you you'll tell me there's no such thing as a typical day in practice for you, but paint a picture of the types of work you do as a provincial dental health officer, can you give me a typical week some of the important elements of what you do?

Dr. Figueiredo: This position involves a lot of responsibilities and work, you know. So, I am involved in the overall picture in leading and coordinating and facilitating the development of evidence-based process, policy, strategies, initiatives, and projects for oral health. Also, I provide supervision, support, and expertise that what I really like, you know, to dental public health programs. Also I'm assessing and reporting of province-wide and local oral health programs to ensure quality and effectiveness of dental services and also I work with the other MOHs of the province, the Medical Office of Health, to optimize prevention in the health of the population but, and also that is [something] I really like and is something that really makes me happy to participate in public health researching and training public health professionals. As you can see that is a broad picture. So, my daily work involves a lot of meetings with other health authorities, the stakeholders, professionals in the discussion and decision making towards issues that needed to be addressed or towards planning strategies and initiatives for the improvement of the oral health status of the population.

Dr. O'Keefe: Do you get the chance to do any clinical work now? Or are you totally nonclinical in your role?

Dr. Figueiredo: Totally, nonclinical, there is no even time for that John,

Dr. O'Keefe: So, Rafael, what do you like most about being a dental public health specialist working with the provincial government?

Dr. Figueiredo: What I really like about the job that I have, you know, that it's providing the ability and freedom to do what I know, and I do the best. And you're only able to do your best when you are happy and satisfied with what you do. Consequently, you know, if you do your best, even if it's not immediately right away, but the recognition in the professional compensation will be awarded to you at some point. And that is really satisfying, you know. So, for example, in my area specifically, I was able to accomplish really much more than I ever could imagine as a dental public health officer. I was able to express all my professional knowledge in full scope of my abilities as a specialist.

Dr. Figueiredo: So for example, I developed the oral health action plan for Alberta with 4 major domains, so health promotion, prevention, treatment research, and surveillance. So each domain is correlated to a specific initiative and objective to meet the population needs and to address oral health inequities. So, as you can see is a very broad scope and the depth is very satisfying as a professional and as a specialist. Other examples, you know, I had the ability to create a very

innovative surveillance tool that is quite interactive. We've what we call the dental health surveillance dashboard where I use indicators that are available through our health care system to make a profile of the oral health stats of the population here in Alberta. Based on my knowledge, it was the first and the only dental health surveillance dashboard available. So that enabled to have the ability of my creativity and innovative and also what is not very common that I managed to do is to bring a strong research perspective to the public health field. And believe it or not, I am publishing in peer-reviewed journals as much as I was doing as a researcher in academic field. So, that is really rewarding as well. And another point is that the more I do more I learn and identify things that I can do. So that is very exciting. I love it.

Dr. O'Keefe: So, as a final question for today, Rafael, have you got any pearls of advice for any young colleagues who might be thinking of applying to a dental public health specialty program in Canada or elsewhere?

Dr. Figueiredo: I think as we had mentioned before, I think the first advice for those potential candidates to do what they want to do, what they like the most, you know, what are their passions, you know, because when you are happy for sure you'll be successful as a professional. So, my advice is to follow your instinct; always there is a space for a good professional, doesn't matter in which area they are. Second what I advise, you know, if they are not sure which specialty you want or would like to pursue, take their time to do their general dentistry, you know, get a real general sense of the profession. And from there you'll be able to identify which area that you prefer because it's very common when you're doing undergrad, you know, it's very common to have a preference to an area that is related to a professor that you admire, you know, but is not always, is your passion, you know? So, take the time to identify your area. and the last advice, you know, is that I don't recommend any body to do a specialty program just for the specialty or for any other reason besides of a real passion that is the point. And do what you like, you know. If your passion needs to be a general dentist, you know, there's nothing wrong with that. You'll do your best and the point is to be the best that you could be.

Dr. O'Keefe: Dr Rafael Figueiredo, thank you very much for taking time to speak to us today and thank you for highlighting the importance of passion and being happy in whatever aspect of the career that you decide to pursue.

Dr. Figueiredo: Thank you very much for the opportunity.