

Dr. Trista Felty – Practicing Orthodontist

- Dr. O'Keefe: So, I'm speaking today with Dr Trista Felty who's an orthodontist in the lower mainland in BC, and I want to get her insights about what life is like as an orthodontic specialist in Canada. Trista, give us a little bit of your background, what's the nature of your practice now? Where did you do your specialty program? When did you do it? Where did you do your Undergrad?
- Dr. Felty: Yes, so I'm actually from the states. I grew up in Pennsylvania and I went to school in Pennsylvania. I went to Temple University for dental school, which is in Philadelphia, and I matched and stayed at temple for my residency program. I actually was part of an all-female residency class. There were six women in my residency class, which was unusual, but it was a truly great experience. And then when I was in dental school, I met a Canadian who's a general dentist, and so I got imported to BC after I graduated. And I started practicing here, so I had to redo my licensing here when I first moved, took the RCDC exam and then started practicing out of my husband's general dentistry practice, initially. I did that for probably about two years until I met an orthodontist in town. We got connected through a sales rep and we opened a practice together four years ago.
- Dr. Felty: It's a little bit unconventional because we had never practiced together before and we went in as 50-50 partners from day one, so I didn't buy in as an associate or at 25% we joined the practice, we split the bills, we made a new space, and I think that was really good because it made us want to make it work and it made us want to be generous and good to each other because that's good to the practice. And we've been working together, we co-treat patients for the past four years and it's been a really good experience.
- Dr. O'Keefe: Well, let me just go back a tiny little bit and I'm not sure if I caught the years that you did your specialty program, but what attracted you to go into the specialty of orthodontics in the first place?
- Speaker 2: Well, I graduated dental school in 2010 and I did my residency program immediately after, so I finished in the fall of 2012, but I got interested in orthodontics because I had braces three times. So, I was in the orthodontist's office a lot. And I think, you know, it's really about, we hear this all the time, it's about the people you meet. And so, I know a lot of people are afraid of the dentist, but I've always had a very pleasant experience at the dentist. I think part of that was because I had a female dentist who had three little boys about my age and so she knew all the cartoons that I watched as a kid. I could connect with her and I enjoyed chatting with her and so I was never scared of her. And then when I went to the orthodontist, I had a very similar experience where he was very personable, he was very warm, I felt comfortable there.

Dr. Felty: I didn't feel like I was pesting with questions. And so, by the time I got to high school and I was back in treatment, I was really kind of hammering. I'm like, you know, well, why aren't my teeth moving? And I'm doing everything, what's going on? And he was showing me, and he let me come into the office and just kind of watch. And I think that just kind of paved the way for something that I was interested in from having all those positive experiences myself.

Dr. O'Keefe: What is a typical work day for you as an orthodontic specialist look like?

Dr. Felty: Yeah, so we see on average in our practice anywhere from about 35 to 55 patients a day. And what's really cool with Ortho is you will see models that practitioners who see 15 patients and you will see models where practitioners are seeing 115 patients. Ortho is really special in that way because the technology can vary. practice to practice, the setups can vary. But for us, we see patients usually 8.30 to 5 every day. We have a long day on Wednesdays where we see patients from 7.30 to 7 and my partner and I do a split shift and yeah, I mean we tend to try to do our heavier appointments in the morning so we're bonding and debonding usually when we're nice and fresh and we're ready to tackle the day and then we get kind of slammed in the afternoon because everyone wants to come in after school for us. Right? Most of our patients are teenagers. We kind of know, we gotta be prepared and those are quick appointments cause we're trying to get as many people to be seen before they have to miss any class.

Dr. O'Keefe: So, if I am your patient and you and your partner are co-treating me, what does that look like?

Dr. Felty: Yeah so from the patient's aspect, for them, they can schedule whenever they want and they're going to see both of us during their treatment. On our end, what that means is that we're treatment planning cases together. So, one of us will see a patient for a consult and will meet them for the first time. And then when we take our records, we'll go over those cases together and come up with a treatment plan. After practicing together for four years, we pretty much know how the other one thing or what we're going to want to do. But we review those cases and then we do really try to get the patient's next appointment; so, like their bonding appointment, to be with the other doctor. Just so right from the beginning, they've met both of us and they're not kind of like six months in before I've met them, which can happen sometimes just based on schedules. So, it's always funny because you recognize their teeth because you've been following their cases, but you might not have actually met the person, Oh I get to finally meet you, put these teeth to a face here. So yeah.

Dr. O'Keefe: And what do you like best about being a specialist?

Dr. Felty: Well the nice thing for Ortho is most people aren't scared to come to see us. My husband does deal with some patients that are phobic and I think he kind of likes the challenge of that, of trying to help someone get over a fear. But for us, I mean it's rare that we get someone that we have to deal with if they're scared, if they're scared, it's okay, we're going to wait until you're a little bit older and you feel comfortable here. So, it's nice in that sense that you know, most of our patients, are healthy, they're happy, they want to be there for the most part, maybe 18 months in, they're kind of like, I don't want to be here anymore, get these braces off. But, and the other really neat part for me is that I get to see a lot of variety.

Dr. Felty: I get to see kids that are five and we're just watching development. And I have adults now that are in their eighties that are doing straightening because they figure, you know what? Life expectancy is way longer. They have the disposable income. It's a concern that they may have had for a while. So, for me, I think it's a lot of variety in terms of what I get to do everyday and the types of patients I get to see. One other thing that's really good for orthodontics is that it's something that you can get involved in locally, nationally as well. So, for me, one thing that I'd done is try to get involved in the BC Society of Orthodontists and in the BC Dental Association. And I think it's important as specialists that we also get involved on the dental aspect too. I think there's this really strong misconception that the CDA or the ADA doesn't represent me as a specialist because they represent general dentists.

Dr. Felty: But I think that's a skewed view. Of course, there's more general dentists and specialists in these organizations, but we are part of a larger pie here. And if we want to elevate patient care, we have to do it together, not as individual groups. And I think the other thing too is a lot of people will say, well, I'm in a small minority, and orthodontics is, we're still a pretty big group, but if you're an oral pathologist, there's not too many. So, they may say, well, I don't really have a voice here, but I think you also have to remember if you're not a part of these associations, it's not that you don't even have a voice, you're not even in the building anymore. You don't know what's going on and no one's gonna know what your concerns are either. So, I encourage members to get involved young and to stay involved because sitting around and complaining or getting upset on Facebook is not going to help change the profession. So, we're always looking for people and just reach out to any of your local organizations and I'm sure they can use the help and assistance.

Dr. O'Keefe: To round this off Trista, have you some advice that you'd give to a person who's considering a career as a specialist and entering a specialty program?

Dr. Felty: I think the best advice is to go to a couple practices and just observe. I suggest doing a few because practices can vary quite a bit but get a feel for what a day looks like in the life of a specialist and see if it's something that you're keen on

because it's going to be the thing that you focus on completely. So, for me, I love it. I love feeling like I have this one area that I can be an expert on. For my husband, That's not enough variety for him. He loves general dentistry and being able to do a little bit of everything. So really go in, see how people practice. It also gives you a great idea of how you want to practice when you graduate.

Dr. O'Keefe: Well, that's I think, very solid advice. And I want to thank you very much for this most illuminating testimonial.

Dr. Felty: Sure. No problem. Happy to help.