

Dr. Elahi Behrooz – Becoming a Prosthodontist

Dr. O'Keefe: Today, I'm delighted to welcome Dr. Ela Behrooz, who's a prosthodontist, a newly minted prosthodontist, working in the Greater Toronto Area. And she's going to talk to us about her experience in deciding to specialize, the program that she chose and how she would give advice to people who were thinking of following the same path. Ela, would you just give us the highlights of your professional career to date and maybe where you hope to go?

Dr. Behrooz: Absolutely. So, hello John. Thank you so much for having me here. It's absolutely a pleasure to be here. So, as you said, I'm Ela, I am a newbie in the prosthodontic world. I finished dental school first time around in Iran and then I did my Master of Business Administration degree at the same time I was doing a part-time hospital residency as we actually had the option to be part-time hospital residents. After coming to Canada, I joined the International Dentists Advanced [Placement] Program at the University of Toronto. In other words, I redid my dental degree. I graduated with my second DDS in 2016 and right after I joined the graduate prosthodontics program at the U of T. I just graduated this past June, so I have been a grad prosth resident for the past three years. I would love to have a balance of private clinical practice, academic career or right now I'm working in private practice, also involved in teaching at the faculty and I'm also in Mount Sinai hospital. So that's been the story up to now.

Dr. O'Keefe: And it's a very interesting story if I may say so. But what attracted you to specialize and why prosth?

Dr. Behrooz: I've always been fascinated with the field of prosthodontics, I have to say. So, I guess the challenging treatment planning aspect, the outcome of care that we provide, which can potentially have such a profound biological, emotional and social impact on our patients. These were some of the factors that gravitated me to prosth. I always knew I wanted to either be a prosthodontist or to limit my practice to prosthodontics. It was what appealed to me most from going through undergrad dental school. In Canada, I have to say I was exposed to world class, amazing prosthodontic mentors and educators. Learning from them and shadowing them made an impact on me and after my exposure to such amazing prosthodontic leaders who were absolutely brilliant, extremely generous with sharing their knowledge and expertise and lived very inspiring lives. It made me determined to dedicate the rest of my life to becoming good at prosth.

Dr. O'Keefe: Now you're living in Toronto, you'd come to Canada, was grad prosth at U of T pretty well the only choice that you absolutely had to get, or did you apply to lots of other places too?

Dr. Behrooz: I did apply to a couple of other places as well in the US. However, the grad prosth program at the U of T had a great reputation, great leaders in the field being involved with the program. I was also enjoying living in Toronto very much. Plus, my undergrad experience here at U of T was very positive. Therefore I decided to stay in Toronto undergo my postgrad training here at U of T and I mean I guess practicing prosthodontics allows you to experience the end results of small and large reconstructions that we do with patients experience the improvement in the aesthetics and function that patients have. And I guess my exposure here to the prosthodontists here made me want to stay here and continue my collaboration with them.

Dr. O'Keefe: Well you spent three years as a prosth resident, no doubt you got up to different things during that time with different emphasis at different times but give us some picture of what it's like to be a resident. What sorts of things do you get to do?

Dr. Behrooz: So, I guess as a resident, as we progress from the first to the third year, our experiences and our daily lives do change. It gets more clinical and research heavy as we proceed from the first year to the third year and less didactic heavy. But I would say maybe a typical day in grad prosth at U of T would start at 7:30 or 8:00ish. Lectures on different prosthodontic and non-prosthodontic related topics. Treatment planning, presentations and literature reviews where the residents on the program director or other lecturers sit together and have lectures and seminars. Then clinic start, which typically run either in the morning or in the afternoon or both. On some days there are seminars or presentations after the afternoon clinic as well. And after the day is done, the resident's pretty much responsible for reading, studying, preparing presentations and seminars and some lab work. On some days there are external rotations at different clinics or hospitals to expose the residents to hospital-based prosthodontics, maxillofacial prosth and caring for children with prosthodontic needs as well.

Dr. O'Keefe: Right. So, you're kept busy?

Dr. Behrooz: Oh, absolutely. 100%.

Dr. O'Keefe: And what did you like best about the training program?

Dr. Behrooz: I would, I mean I'm repeating myself, but I would say the fact that we had access to world class, amazingly knowledgeable leaders in the field of prosthodontics was priceless to me. Our exposure to these individuals, amazing mentors that we had, supervisors, was definitely one of the highlights of the program. Also, U of T being a very old school and one of the pioneers in implant dentistry, after professor George Zarb's efforts, it does allow the residents to get exposure to very many different implant systems, complications, which in today's

prosthodontic training definitely provides us with a competitive edge. So, we saw a large number of patients with a variety of presentations, be it related to the reconstructions they had or complications that they were facing, and they required management. So, we all think of ourselves as being extremely lucky for such exposures.

Dr. O'Keefe: Now, let's focus on advice that you would give to senior students or early career dentists who are thinking of specializing, who might even be thinking about the idea of prostho, and then the idea of a choice. Have you any pearls of wisdom to pass on to people following in your, hopefully your foot path?

Dr. Behrooz: I think if I could say one thing, I would say take your time in making decisions. Some of us may know what we want from undergrad experience. Some of us need to do a hospital residency to find out. Some of us may benefit from a few years of private practice as a GP to realize where our true passions are. Exposure to different fields of dentistry. Leaders in different fields of dentistry, different specialty programs may be very beneficial. I guess the message is there is no need for all of us to know what we want right away and there is no need for all of us to specialize. Patients need great GPs and great specialists to work together collaboratively to provide the best care to them. So, I guess take your time and just find out where your passion is.

Dr. O'Keefe: And you put a huge emphasis on mentors and particular individuals who influenced you. Would you think for anybody who's thinking of going into a specialty program that they should get to know the leaders in the field, do their best to network and see if they could follow on the coattails of those greats?

Dr. Behrooz: Absolutely. Absolutely. So, mentorship has changed the way I look at things. It's changed my life. A mentor typically believes in you more than you believe in yourself. So, their belief in you is so unshakeable that they make you realize that you can do things that you never thought you would be able to do. And to me, I've been exceptionally lucky in this aspect. I definitely recommend trying to network, reach out to people who are good at what they do and are nice enough to share how they became so good. So, mentorship, seeking people the advice of people who are better than us. Absolutely priceless.

Dr. O'Keefe: And I suppose in the future people will be able to reach out to you and you'll be happy to share with them?

Dr. Behrooz: I would be more than happy. I'm far from being a mentor at this stage in my career, but I would be more than happy to help anyone who wants to apply to any program at our university here at U of T. If I can do anything for anyone who's applying to any other school, I have limited knowledge, but again, I would be more than happy to do so. It's an honor to be contacted by anyone who requires help.



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Dr. O'Keefe: Well, to quote yourself, I would believe in you more as a mentor than you clearly believe in yourself at present about the topic. Thanks very much for that generous offer. Ela, thanks for taking time to be with me today and for sharing those, I think priceless insights.

Dr. Behrooz: Thank you so much. Thank you for having me here. I really appreciate it and as always, it's a pleasure to be working with you, John. Thank you.