

Dr. Maneesh Sharma – on His Career as a Specialist in Endodontics

Dr. O'Keefe: Today I welcome Dr. Maneesh Sharma. And he's an endodontist in private practice here in Ottawa and we're going to discuss his perspectives on life as an endodontic specialist. Maneesh, could you just give us a brief career trajectory to date for yourself?

Dr. Sharma: Sure. I've been an endodontist in Kanata, Ontario. I'm in a group practice with another endodontist. I did my specialty training at the State University of New York at Buffalo. I graduated in 1997 and have been in private practice in Ottawa ever since. I started off in a large group practice for three years and then I opened my own practice in 2001. I added a partner four years later and have been in a group practice ever since. Now, in addition to practicing endodontics I've also been very involved in the social side of dentistry. I've been a past-president of the Ottawa Dental Study Club, the Ottawa Dental Society. I was a 6-year term member on the General Council of the Ontario Dental Association and have been on the executive of the Canadian Academy of Endodontics and have been the president of the Canadian Academy for the past year.

Dr. O'Keefe: So, it's clear from your experiences that you believe it's very important to be involved, not just practice.

Dr. Sharma: Absolutely. By getting involved in dental societies, etc., it allows you to interact with other dentists. And if you're a specialist, it's a great avenue to interact with general dentists and find out what their concerns are and how you can best work together and build relationships. Because that's very important as a specialist because you can't be on an island by yourself because sadly that is not a very successful way to build a practice.

Dr. O'Keefe: Why did you become a specialist in the first place?

Dr. Sharma: Well, I became interested in specializing after I was exposed to the various specialties through dental school. My personality is such that I prefer to be more focused and expert more in one area and that's endeavor to do the best I can in that one facet to the best of my ability. So, going through school I enjoyed acute care dentistry and that drew me to either endodontics or oral surgery. And I enjoyed the various facets of surgical and nonsurgical endodontics and that became my primary goal.

Dr. O'Keefe: Did you spend any time in general practice or did you pretty well head straight into specialty training?

Dr. Sharma: I personally went straight from school into my residency because I know myself as a person. Some people, I have lots of colleagues who went, they, you know,

did associateships, they did internships and they went to grad programs, some went other routes. But I know myself, had I gone out of the school environment, I think it would have been harder for me to come back. So, I knew if that's the way I wanted to go, I knew I would do it all at one time.

Dr. O'Keefe:

Right. Fair enough. So, what's it like to work as a specialist? Could you give us some sort of idea of the, how you order your day or your week? What's the nature of what you do in a day or a typical week?

Dr. Sharma:

Sure. My typical day involves usually five to six treatments per day, whether surgical or nonsurgical treatments and usually three to five consultations during the day, depending on the number of treatments that I have. You know, to be honest, the number of surgeries that I do has decreased over the years so the majority of treatments that we're doing are either initial treatments or retreatment cases, and that's become a greater part of the proportion of my day now.

Dr. O'Keefe:

Now you said at the beginning that you enjoy your acute care dentistry. How do you leave spaces in your day for emergencies?

Dr. Sharma:

Yeah, we always leave time at the end of the day. So, we always, you know, even though we say we're booked, you know, I see patients till 4 o'clock on my schedule, my staff know we may be there till 5 o'clock. So, we always leave room for emergencies there and you know, and sometimes you don't get lunch. It's the reality of it. But also, managing emergencies, the more you've been out you become a little more efficient at managing emergencies and so sometimes you can squeeze them in through your day. But it's usually not too bad. As long as you leave yourself some time. Whether it's in the middle of the day, because I know my partner, he tends to not stay late but he likes to work through lunch, so we always have extra staff, so somebody to cover and assist over lunch time. So there's ways you can get around it. But the important thing is allocating a portion of your day where you do see emergencies because we are an emergency driven practice and specialty so to say that we can't see your emergencies is again is not a practice builder.

Dr. O'Keefe:

I can only imagine that handling emergencies quickly and efficiently and well must be a practice builder.

Dr. Sharma:

Absolutely.

Dr. O'Keefe:

What do you like best about being a specialist?

Dr. Sharma:

Well, I mean, endodontics encompasses a mixture of, you know, radiology, oral pathology, diagnosis and treatment planning, pain management, anesthesia, dental materials. So, you know, I enjoy dealing with a wide variety of patients

and dentists as well. You know, general dentists today are doing more cases today than they were in the past. I mean, training in dental school is better, comfort levels for dentists are better, and that's fine. And so, as a result, the difficulty level of cases that we see today has increased and the challenges posed keep our days very interesting.

Dr. O'Keefe: Well, if somebody has been bitten by the bug and has decided to explore a career in endodontics, have you got some advice about how they should go about knowing number one, if it's the right program for them, specialty for them, and which training program to choose? How would you go about that today?

Dr. Sharma: Sure. I would try and get as much exposure and experiences in dental school if you can. I would recommend externships, if they're available. I know I had lots of colleagues when I was in dental school who did externships in oral surgery, etc., so depending on your specialty some are more easily attainable than others. If none are available, then I would recommend a residency after graduation or associating for a period of time. You need to get those experiences to see, you know, is this something that I really am interested in? Is this something I really want to do? I would also invite prospective people to speak to specialists and attend continuing education conferences for various prospective specialties. This would give great access to residents, faculties and programs. They always attend because it's usually mandatory for their programs. And these conferences will also present the latest advances and directions of the specialty to allow prospective individuals to see if the specialty is truly for them.

Dr. O'Keefe: But just what you've said there, I know that general practitioners are invited to be able to attend Canadian Academy of Endo annual conferences. Perhaps that would be a good place to get more information if you're thinking of specializing?

Dr. Sharma: Absolutely. And, and it so turns out we have at our meeting coming up this year in September in Mont-Tremblant, I know we have at least, I think two or three non-endodontists that have registered to come to the course. So, I mean, I think it's a great avenue in and you'll get a great sampling of people to talk to from different programs and it's a great way to build relationships. Even after, you know, once you get into a program, to see where you want to go, who may be looking for associates? So, there's great opportunities that lie ahead.

Dr. O'Keefe: Any final word of advice, based on all your years of experience?

Dr. Sharma: I mean, I think endodontics is a great specialty. I think it offers a lot for patients. It allows a great reward for the practitioner as well. And just being a specialist in general is great because it allows you the opportunity not just to deal with patients, it allows you to deal with colleagues and share stories, and sometimes

commiserate and sometimes question and learn and foster, you know, community. And I think that's very important in this day and age such that, you know, we don't all end up on an island on our own. And I think the group think is a very good thing for the, for not just the specialty but for the dental community going forward.

Dr. O'Keefe: Knowing you, Maneesh, I bet you there's more celebrations than commiserations.

Dr. Sharma: (Laughter). Thanks John let's hope for everyone.

Dr. O'Keefe: Dr. Maneesh Sharma, thank you so much for taking time today to share your insights for the benefit of our younger colleagues.

Dr. Sharma: Thanks John. My pleasure.