

Dr. David Makar – Going Through an Orthodontics Specialty Program

- Dr. O'Keefe: Today I welcome Dr. David Makar, and he's currently doing orthodontic specialty training at the University of Toronto where he's an ortho resident. Welcome David.
- Dr. Makar: Thank you.
- Dr. O'Keefe: Give us just the highlights of your professional career to date, please, and maybe some idea of where you hope to go after you finish your training.
- Dr. Makar: Of course. So, I graduated from the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, obviously dentistry, from Western in 2017. Thereafter I completed a general practice residency at Sunnybrook, here in Toronto through the University of Toronto. And at the end of that I was luckily accepted into graduate orthodontics, again at UofT, and that's where I began in 2018. So right now I'm beginning my second year and hoping to graduate in 2021, if all goes well.
- Dr. O'Keefe: Now, why did you choose to study to become an orthodontist?
- Dr. Makar: So, this might be a pretty typical answer but the whole reason I got into dentistry to begin with was because of my personal experience with orthodontics and with my orthodontist as an adolescent. So I kind of made orthodontics my ultimate goal with dentistry being a necessary step in order to get where I luckily am today. But I should say that along the way, while I was in dentistry, I really did push myself to kind of keep all my options open, explore everything that kind of piqued my interest, but I always always came back to orthodontics.
- Dr. O'Keefe: A positive role model had a huge impact on your career decision in general and ortho in particular.
- Dr. Makar: Certainly. Certainly.
- Dr. O'Keefe: I suppose that's a message for all of us that we're always potentially role models for new people to come into our profession.
- Dr. Makar: Mentorship is huge, I think.
- Dr. O'Keefe: Now, you're a busy guy I bet you in your specialty program, how many of you are in your year, in your class?
- Dr. Makar: So in my year there's four of us. So I have three other co-residents. And every year there's a gap student or an international orthodontist that's accepted for a

One-year qualifying program. So for the first year it's five and every other year thereafter, it's four of us.

- Dr. O'Keefe: Well, what do the four of you get up to? Typical day, typical week of an ortho resident at UofT.
- Dr. Makar: So, a typical day is almost always 8:30 to 5:00, 9:00 to 5:00 and it varies from a split of 50/50 classroom, didactic work, clinical work, to full days of clinic or full days of class. Every once in a while, there's a seminar or a meeting that we attend, but there's definitely a lot of after-hours work involved for sure. We're required to do a masters, so research is something that we have to actively be involved in and make time for, which is sometimes a challenge, but overall the experience is amazing. It's a lot different than, you know, your typical undergraduate training. The classes, like you had mentioned much smaller, there's only four or five of us. And rather than sitting down and just being lectured to, we kind of sit around a round table and we talk to each other, we present to each other, self-learning, and things very often become a conversation. So in dental school, while once in a while you could get away with blending in and staying quiet in a graduate program if you haven't done your reading and if you're not really prepared, it's pretty obvious. So it's [inaudible] to prepare for, for sure.
- Dr. O'Keefe: And does that speak something towards the what you have to do after hours? Is just a, there's a lot of study, there's a lot of research.
- Dr. Makar: A lot of preparing, for sure.
- Dr. O'Keefe: Right. But, must be quite exciting though. It'd be like, it's active learning and it's just the exchange with your colleagues, other intellectually very, very advanced people. It must be just super exciting.
- Dr. Makar: Definitely. The dynamic is amazing. Like I said, it's a conversation but like, you know, a high-level conversation, and you learn, you learn a ton that way.
- Dr. O'Keefe: I'm interested to know how early in your training program you've got to get your mind around the research project that you're going to do?
- Dr. O'Keefe: They get us going quite early actually, within the first week we started having meetings and seminars as to which way you want, you might want to go in terms of your research, what type of research you want to do. They start throwing preliminary ideas towards you. And obviously the steps involved and the requirements. So yeah, pretty early on they make you well aware of what's expected and where you should be at different points throughout the residency.
- Dr. O'Keefe: And want you enjoying most about your training program?

- Dr. Makar: Definitely enjoying just the orthodontics part of it. It's a lot of fun to be doing what I've always wanted to do every day. I found that I enjoyed a lot of aspects of dentistry, but the more and more I do orthodontics, the more I appreciate how much I really do love it. It's very different from general dentistry, so every step is challenging, but the rewards that come with each step are unbelievable to me. The cases we take on are seemingly pretty difficult, at least in my experience, especially in such a big city where there are so many orthodontists. So, what falls in the lap of a university program is really the nitty gritty, at least hopefully.
- Dr. O'Keefe: Now at this stage of your training, can you envisage what you see yourself doing in 5, 10 years time?
- Dr. Makar: I see myself obviously hopefully being in the GTA. This is where it grew up. This is where my family and all my friends are. In terms of being an associate or owning a practice, I think I would love to own a practice in 10 years, but I see no problem with being an associate and learning the ropes, especially the business of things, which, you know, we don't get too, too much experience in. So hopefully associateship transitioning into owning something or starting something of my own would be ideal.
- Dr. O'Keefe: Right. From where you're sitting today, would you have any advice for either a senior dental student or a practitioner who's out, a GP who's out, who's now thinking of maybe throwing their hat in the ring and going for ortho training?
- Dr. Makar: So, for the dental students, I would say number one, first and foremost, just do your best in school. Grades do matter. I think in applications they never really tell you what's weighted in terms of what's the most important aspect of an application. But obviously I think grades are important. I'd encourage getting involved in research and extracurriculars. Research is a really important part of every graduate program, like we already discussed. Extracurriculars, staying balanced, being involved, I think that's really important. But most of all I would say just to stay open to all aspects of dentistry. Don't, don't put yourself in a box. Allow yourself to get out there, figure out what you like, and more importantly I think what you don't like. It's important to be open-minded. If something piques your interest, I think it's important to pursue it further. Find out if it's for you. Look for shadowing and volunteer opportunities. Talk to specialists if you do want to specialize, it only helps reinforce the ultimate decision that I think you'll end up making.
- Dr. Makar: The more doors you open and the more doors you keep open, the better. Even if you know what you want to do I think it's important to explore everything, so your final decision is that much more educated. And finally, I'd recommend this to everybody, is to do a GPR. Regardless of what you want to do, whether it's any specialty or stay in general practice, it was invaluable to me. The things that

I learned in my GPR are things that were only explained in theory in dental school that I think most dentists don't see very much of every day. So, it's just, it just synthesizes everything, and it opens your eyes to so much more as to what dentistry really is.

Dr. O'Keefe: Now, I can only imagine that doing ortho in Toronto would hold a lot of advantages to you. You're from there, your family's there, you've very familiar with everything. Did you apply to other places or would you give any advice about the [number] of places to apply to or how to choose where to apply to?

Dr. Makar: I did. I applied across Canada. So, I applied to U of T, I applied to Western, I applied to University of Manitoba and the University of Alberta. I think in the end I picked the University of Toronto for a number of reasons: rich history, its very strong clinical program, strong academic program, but it's also home. I spent eight years away. I spent four years undergrad in London, four years dental school in London. Like I was saying, I grew up in Toronto, so family, friends, everybody's here for me. But really, I did feel that it was the strongest program that suited me.

Dr. O'Keefe: And you never considered applying in the United States to any of the specialty training programs, did you?

Dr. Makar: I did. I did consider it, but I really thought that I had a reasonable chance of staying in Canada and they're much smaller programs than are in the US. So, I thought no matter what, it would have been advantageous to stay here. So that was my first try and luckily, I was accepted, but I see no harm in applying to the US as well.

Dr. O'Keefe: Well, I congratulate you getting your first choice and seemingly doing so well in your graduate studies. I want to thank you very much for sharing your wisdom with us today.

Dr. Makar: Thank you very much.