

Dr. Kim Ngai - On Going Through a Specialty Program

- Intro:** Hello and welcome. You're listening to a new episode of the CDA Oasis podcast. Thank you for downloading this edition of our audio programs. We do hope you enjoy it. Please tell us what you think and remember to tell other people about us on social media.
- Dr. O'Keefe:** Today I'm delighted to welcome Dr. Kimberly Ngai, who is a resident in the pediatric dentistry program at the University of Toronto and she's going to give us her perspectives on applying for a specialty program and what's it like to be a grad student in pediatric dentistry. Kim, could you just give us a brief outline of your professional career to date, please?
- Dr. Ngai:** Of course. So, I'm Kim. I went to dental school at the University of Western Ontario, in London. I graduated in 2016 and then I did a general practice residency specializing in pediatrics at the IWK in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for a year. And then fortunately I was accepted to the graduate pediatric program at the University of Toronto after that. And so I'm currently in my third year.
- Dr. O'Keefe:** And you'll be graduating next...
- Dr. Ngai:** Yeah. And I'll be graduating in 2020, summer 2020.
- Dr. O'Keefe:** Perfect. Well, why did you go for grad school?
- Dr. Ngai:** To be honest, I never really thought I would specialize, especially in pediatric dentistry, going into or even in my first couple of years of dental school. And it wasn't until the summer between my third and fourth year where I happened to be working at a pediatric office with Dr. Clive Friedman when I actually realized what pediatric dentistry was and how much I enjoyed it. I looked forward to going to work every day. I loved the atmosphere of the office and how we interacted with the staff and patients and parents. And it's just, the general overall approach to dentistry was something that I was really drawn towards. And I think one of the main reasons I never thought of specializing previously, was because I wanted to have that continuity of care with my patients and develop a relationship with them. And in my mind specialists never really got that chance to do that.
- Dr. Ngai:** But in pediatric dentistry it's different and you do get to do that, and as well as so much more. Because you get to see them so young, you really get an opportunity to see them grow and have an opportunity to be involved with prevention, which I think is really important. And also, the chance to work with children who are young and don't want to be there, or who are extremely anxious or with special needs and you actually get to help them get to a point

where they can accept dentistry. And I think getting to that point is really rewarding and something I really want to be able to do.

Dr. O'Keefe: It strikes me from talking to you that the whole people aspect of dentistry is terribly important to you. And developing that you had a mentor, Clive is just a heck of a wonderful person and a real role model. Did that cement it for you, that, just what you saw with Clive?

Dr. Ngai: It definitely sparked my interest. And it's a funny story because going into the summer working with him, I even told him, I don't think I'm interested in pediatric dentistry. I just think it's a very good opportunity. And he's like, by the end of it you'll, like, you might change your mind. And I definitely did. So, he definitely has a very important kind of role in where I am today and why I'm interested in pediatric dentistry.

Dr. O'Keefe: And I noted at the beginning you said you did your residency in IWK, in Halifax, and you were focusing on pediatrics there. I guess you were just doing the final little test if that was the right place for you.

Dr. Ngai: Yeah, that definitely was. So, he sparked my interest. I know there was still like one more year of dental school but, interested in pediatrics and actually doing it full time is a different story. And so, I wanted to kind of confirm that I wanted to do this day in and out and so that's why I chose that pediatric general practice residency. And working there, yeah, solidified it, confirmed what I really wanted to do. Dr. Ross Anderson is another one of, I would say one of my mentors and he definitely played another role in where I am today.

Dr. O'Keefe: Maybe there's no such thing as a typical day of the life of a resident, but paint a picture for the typical week and maybe it changes in year one, two and three?

Dr. Ngai: Yeah, so as you mentioned, every day is different. It's a kind of a sort of a mixed bag of either class or seminars, clinic. Maybe you're on rotation or you have some research time. And because it is a three-year program that has a master's or a research component to it, there is a different focus. So, in first year it's very course and didactic based. We're mostly in class. We have tons of readings. It's actually kind of overwhelming, but this is where you gain most of your knowledge of pediatric dentistry and this way in your further years, you're able to kind of apply that knowledge. And so, in second and third year you're definitely in more clinic. So, you can be at the dental school. We have a surgical centre, so you might be seeing cases under general anesthesia or oral sedation. We also work quite closely with SickKids or other locations from our other rotations. And so, as you, I guess you go through the program, you definitely get to apply the knowledge you've learned in first year as well as kind of hone in on those clinical skills,

Dr. O'Keefe: Now, sort of halfway through your third year, you're doing research, you're in clinic, can you parcel things out by percentage? Like where you're devoting your time?

Dr. Ngai: I guess every student, depending on how their project is going, will have a different percentage. So, my goal was to try to finish within the beginning of this or I guess beginning of 2020. And so, I'm trying to devote more time right now in my research. And then hopefully my plan is to start studying and just focus on getting, like getting ready for the boards and stuff next year. But I was lucky that I was finishing my data collection at the end of my second year, so I had kind of a 50/ 50 percentage allocation to that. But now I think...

Dr. O'Keefe: It's interesting that you have some flexibility in how you use your time.

Dr. Ngai: Yeah. So, they give us some allotted research time. Especially for my project because it was lab-based, I really had to go in after hours or on weekends. But it did allow me to have that flexibility and that was one of the reasons why I chose my project. But it is nice in that every day is a little bit different. And some days you have long days and some days you have short days, but you have that schedule so you can kind of work around it to kind of get what you need to get done.

Dr. O'Keefe: So, did you choose the project or did the project choose you?

Dr. O'Keefe: It's a little bit of both. I approached Dr. Finer, who's my supervisor, and he had a couple of ideas of projects and we kind of found one that I was interested in. And so, it was a little give and take, but everyone's a little bit different. Some people come into the program with a specific project in mind. The one I did, it was a little bit too difficult to do within I think a three-year like specialty master's program and so this seemed to kind of suit both of us. Yeah.

Dr. O'Keefe: Right. Did you ever think of going on to do a PhD?

Dr. Ngai: Uh, I've considered it but maybe I might take a break from academia. I think I'm like nearing the end that I'd want to try to do something different first. But I've definitely thought about it.

Dr. O'Keefe: I have no doubt about that. What do you like best about your specialty training program?

Dr. Ngai: I think one of the things is just gaining or having the knowledge and eventually that confidence to deal with any or almost any situation that comes my way in terms of pediatric dentistry. And if there is a situation where I am uncertain of at least I know where or how to attain that knowledge and I don't think you can get to that point without some sort of formal training. And so I do appreciate in

that respect. And as a specialist I know you're supposed to be the top of your field and of course I strive to get there. But you also become a part of a really special community. And within that community, there are other people you can consult with cases. So, if you do have a question or a problem, they seem to be more than happy to help and guide you.

Dr. Ngai: Because at the end of the day, I think we all have the same kind of goal in mind, which is we want the best for our patients. And I didn't really realize until this past CAPD meeting actually, how small and how nice that community is and I'm really excited to be a part of that. And of course, with any kind of residency program, there are ups and downs and I think I've had such a positive residency experience because of my two co-residents. And so, I've been very fortunate to go through this grad program, not only with colleagues that I will be working with in the future, but also friends. And I think that's why it's been such a positive experience.

Dr. O'Keefe: Again, Kim Ngai, it's all about the people from what comes out in your discourse, which is most interesting. Now, imagine I'm a senior dental student, DDS or a year or two out, I'm thinking of maybe exploring studying pediatric dentistry. Give me some practical advice about how to start my quest to choose the right program for me.

Dr. Ngai: I think first off, I would say is just to keep an open mind. As I mentioned before, I never thought of specializing. It just so happened I was very lucky that this opportunity arose, and I took it and I had a great mentor, but this opportunity doesn't always just present itself. Sometimes you have to go out and look for it. So, I'd say if you're interested, just go in and talk to people, even general practitioners, the specialists that are in the field that you're interested in. I think you can get some really good insight. But not only going to talk to them but seeing how they practice would really be beneficial and you can get an idea of what that specialty actually is. And I know in dental school, especially thinking back on my experience, you're just trying to study for exams, you're trying to complete your competencies.

Dr. Ngai: You don't really think of what it's going to be like in the future or you only get a small kind of scope of that practice. So actually, getting out there and seeing what it's like in the real world would really, really be helpful and helping you kind of decide if that's what you're interested in. And even if you're a couple of years out, it's never too late. One of my co-residents and some of my instructors worked for multiple years before they came back into specializing. So, if it's something you're truly interested in, I would just encourage you to seek it out, try it. And if it's what you actually like doing it, it's definitely worth it.

Dr. O'Keefe: Did you apply to a number of schools? Did you apply to the United States as well as Canada? Any thoughts on where to apply?

- Dr. Ngai: I guess that it depends kind of a lot on personal preference. So, for me, I applied to the Canadian schools cause I wanted to stay in Canada, and I want to stay close to my family. I loved my experience out East, in Halifax, but being that far from home, U of T was always kind of the top of my list just because of location. I did apply to some States programs, mainly because of location. So, I picked the ones that was kind of within driving or short flights from Toronto. So that was one of my major deciding factors. I think another one would be if you wanted to do a three-year like master's program or not? And I think that's, a lot of people that would kind of gear their decision because in Canada they're all three-year programs. You have to do a master's, it's three years. Versus in some States you can do two-year programs that are more clinically based. And so, some people tend do that. And I think you just have to find the right fit. When you go for the interview, you'll get a sense of the program or even just talking to past residents, you might be able to get a better idea of the program that fits you.
- Dr. O'Keefe: For the schools in the States that you applied to, did you do site visits? Did you go and talk to the people there?
- Dr. Ngai: I didn't. I spoke to some people, but it was more of kind of, to be honest, like a backup. And what I was fortunate is that U of T had their, or not U of T, but any Canadian schools had their interviews before the American ones. So, I actually found out about my acceptance to U of T prior to even having to go do my interviews in the States. So, it actually worked out really well. But that is something that you have to think about is if you're applying to both and you're more open to both locations, accepting a program earlier or waiting for someone that you might like a little bit more later on is always a bit of a challenge.
- Dr. O'Keefe: I think I know the answer to my last question, but I'll ask it anyway. According to you, there's a bright future in pediatric dentistry?
- Dr. Ngai: I think so. It's something I enjoy. There's always kids that need, you know, our help. I know there's sometimes a lot of changes, but I think if you have an optimistic approach to it, it's... I'm excited. I'm excited.
- Dr. O'Keefe: And that is very clear, Kim. I want to thank you very much for taking time to share your advice. I'm certain that, students and early career dentists will be very happy to listen carefully to your advice.
- Dr. Ngai: No problem. Thanks for having me. And I hope it helps.