Career opportunities and work-life balance in dentistry

By Dr Christine Bellmann

Every graduated dental student has to decide where and how to embark on their professional career. The majority of young dental professionals lay the foundation of their careers in private or public dental clinics, but some also stay at the university to engage in research or teaching careers. Whichever way is chosen at this stage, it does not need to be the final decision. Pathways can be changed and new roads can be explored but the decision should be thought through, as the first year(s) in any profession forms and influences the future career path.

Working in a dental office outside the university provides multiple options and opportunities. Dental practices come in every size and shape. There are small clinics and very large practices. Some have a specialisation or orientation, others are general dental practice models. Each model has, for every individual, certain advantages and disadvantages, depending on field, as knowledge can be gained during the daily workflow and, in combination with a postgraduate course, it can make the perfect choice. To choose the right clinic can be challenging and sometimes the best choice is to go with one’s gut feeling.

Your purpose of specialisation

A lot of young dentists want to specialise in one of the many fields of dentistry. After the decision is made on the area in which to specialise, they should take their time to work out what is the right path of specialisation for them. What is their goal after specialisation? What is the specialisation to be used for; to work in a private dental clinic or establish one’s own clinic? Go into research and education at a university? And what is the goal for the practice?

There are so many programmes on the market and it is not always the best decision to go for the most expensive, most time-consuming or for the one that is the furthest away from home. Studying and working abroad needs to be thought through and well planned, otherwise it can very easily end in a major disappointment. At first, working abroad seems to be a great opportunity and just as exciting and it sure can be this but it does not have to be that way. An accurate assessment, of the goals and the desired outcome of a life in a different country, needs to be conducted.

Others may decide to open their own dental clinic or take over an existing one. Running one’s own business is a great opportunity to work in a comfortable work environment because it is self-created. Aligning a dental office to individual expectation, and having a financially successful and well-run clinic, can be challenging. Like any other business, strategies and standard operating procedures in various fields need to be established. It is not only the clinical abilities of the dentist that are important. Equally important are economic factors like analysis of the local conditions, human resource management, marketing strategies and legal guidelines.

With so many exciting opportunities in the dental field, and so many different options of how and where to work, it is easy to lose track of other important things in life. Time with family and friends or time for leisure activities is very important. In order to find a healthy balance between fulfilling career goals and having an exciting down-time is the key to a happy and healthy life. It makes sense to take the time to reflect on the past and think about future expectations of life and, perhaps, write those down to keep them in mind. During these decision making processes, of all the possible choices that have to be made the most important factor that should be considered is one’s private life, and what one wants in life.

Dr Christine Bellmann is director of Dental Gateway, a global dental consulting agency. On Saturday, she will be presenting a paper at the New Dentist Forum as part of the IDEM 2016 congress programme.