

**Dr. Romika Wadehra**

Dental Ratna Section of Oral Health Magazine has always tried to find the gems in dentistry who make us proud as dental surgeons and motivate us to do better and better. Dr. Santosh Ravindran is another diamond, whose life can motivate many demotivated professionals of dentistry. He started his journey in dentistry like any one of us but has undertaken his journey to the next level by achieving all that he ever wanted to, he is a wonderful clinician, a speaker par excellence, a great human being and above all an expert in handling Special children, which I think is the most difficult aspect of dentistry. He has tried to create a wonderful work life balance by dividing his time between professional work and his family time. He is married to a dental surgeon who has supported him in every endeavour of his and has been like his pillar of strength. He has been recognized for his contribution to dentistry at various levels and we can all learn a lot from his life and progression in dentistry. Thanks Sir for giving us this chance to learn from your experiences.



Meet The Dental Ratnas

**Dr. Santosh
Ravindran****Q1: Sir, was dentistry your first love?**

A1: Dentistry wasn't my first love, unlike many of us who pursued dentistry during that era. Our choices were primarily guided by scores & eligibility criteria. Based on our performance in the 10th grade, we would prioritise science, commerce, or arts. And depending on our 12th grade scores, we would secure admission in fields such as medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, pharmacy, and more. That's how I found myself at GDC MUMBAI, and similarly, many others found their paths in their respective colleges and professions. So, it wouldn't be accurate to say that dentistry was my first love.

Q2: How has your journey as a dentist evolved from your initial days in dentistry to your current role as an academician & renowned speaker?

A2: As I mentioned earlier, it wasn't my first love or something planned, and like many others in the 80s, I entered dentistry not by choice but by my score. By third year, when the picture

of dentistry started getting clear to the brain as we started seeing patients. I adapted to it quickly like a fish to water & haven't looked back since then. In July 1989, I had my first patient at GDC, Mumbai. I graduated in June 1991. Back then, our postgraduate seats were decided by the final year scores, & unfortunately, not a single one of us out of 100 students qualified. I instead decided to open up my practice on 24th March, 1993.

I ventured into the Indian Dental Association (IDA) in 1995. From 1995 to 2005, I served the IDA Mumbai Branch as Hon. Secretary for one term and as President. At the Maharashtra State Branch, I served as CDE Convenor and 1st Vice President for one term. At the IDA Headquarters, I served as Hon. Assistant Secretary for one term. All of this came to a close in 2005, and my journey as an academician, which had started in 2001, picked pace. The academic journey started with preventive dentistry. The next 17 years saw me venture into a few more subjects. Now, after 22 years in the circuit,

the subjects I speak on are Preventive Dentistry, Restorative Dentistry, Rotary Endodontics, Fixed Prosthodontics, Laminates, Teeth Whitening, Special Care Dentistry, and Minimally Invasive Dentistry. I have been able to conduct over 500 events (lectures, workshops, live demos, seminars) nationally & internationally.

I always say, 'I have no regrets. I am happy in my space

Q3: Could you share an inspiring incident that happened with you or with your dental practice that has left a lasting impact on you?

A3: I'll mention one incident that I cannot forget & also that crafted my path. Commuting in Mumbai is renowned for its challenges, particularly during office hours. Therefore, I was pleasantly surprised when an entire family of five made the journey from Ulhasnagar (in Thane district), which is a two-hour drive from our practice. Their determination was evident as they arrived in a car, with their youngest son, a specially abled child who needs dental treatments. It saddened me to learn that he had been denied adequate dental care at other clinics, with some even refusing to treat him. In 2008, we had the privilege of providing dental treatment to this brave young child at our practice. Little did we know that this encounter would become the catalyst for something truly remarkable. The child's mother, moved by the compassionate care we provided, approached me with a heartfelt request: to arrange dental treatment for 12-15 other children with special abilities from their town. With unwavering dedication to their well-being, I reached out to my dear friend, Dr. Ravi Lulla, who generously offered his clinic in Ulhasnagar for this noble cause. And so, on Sundays, we would transform the lives of these extraordinary children. Together, we provided them with the dental care they deserved, ensuring their smiles were as bright as their spirits.

What makes this story even more heartwarming is that these children, now grown up, and their entire families have become an integral part of our dental practice, I believe it is imperative for fresh graduates to embrace the opportunity to learn how to handle individuals with special abilities & cater to their unique dental needs.

Q4: Sir, you specialise in handling special children, and we often encounter many patients with dental phobias in our clinic. Could you please share your experience in dealing with difficult patients?

A4: Indeed, we come across numerous patients who have intense apprehensions and dental phobias. These fears can stem from past traumatic dental experiences or even be influenced by social media or stories heard from others based on their experiences. It is crucial to calm these patients, address their fears, and clear any doubts before proceeding with any dental procedure. The ultimate reassurance for them comes after the treatment, when they realise that the process was smooth & painless, dispelling their pre-treatment worries. One of the most challenging patients I've had the opportunity to handle was at JAI VAKEEL SCHOOL FOR SPECIAL CARE. The patient was a 25-year-old male with severe autism. He

was well-built & physically strong. The dental issue at hand was the extraction of a severely decayed lower second molar. The parents were hesitant about using general anaesthesia or sedation, and they requested me to attempt it with local anaesthesia.

Administering the injection with a closed-mouth technique was the first hurdle. After waiting for about 10 minutes, I began the extraction process. I had three guards to assist me in restraining the patient if necessary. However, getting him to open his mouth proved more challenging than restraining him. Once we managed to achieve mouth opening, the extraction itself became a test of skill & endurance. I had to navigate the delicate task of extracting the tooth without fracturing the tooth or mandible while simultaneously ensuring my own safety from potential bites or physical aggression from the patient. It was mentally as well as physically draining, consuming a considerable amount of time.

However, when the tooth finally came out with complete roots after approximately 20 minutes, it brought an overwhelming sense of achievement. The feeling was truly unparalleled. These experiences, though demanding, remind us of the extraordinary milestones we can reach in our profession.

Q5: Sir, these days young dentists are getting discouraged with dentistry as a profession. What do you have to say to them?

A5: Dentistry holds immense potential as a profession, & its future is undoubtedly bright. There is a significant demand for dental surgeons, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas. In fact, I myself considered starting a practice in a semi-urban area in the past, recognizing the opportunities available there & the kind of need people had. Though it didn't materialise at that time due to connectivity issues, I highly recommend fresh graduates to explore such locations for starting their practice.

By venturing into semi-urban areas, young dentists can enjoy minimal waiting periods and unlimited scope for their practice. Even if it's not their primary practice, it can be operated as a satellite clinic. Additionally, it is our duty and responsibility towards society to provide healthcare services, especially to the underprivileged. While organising camps and giving lectures can help boost one's practice, they should not be mistaken as true social service.

Offering complimentary dental treatments to those in need & those underprivileged is an integral aspect of fulfilling our social responsibility. Instead of spending time, money, and energy solely on visits to places of worship and uncertain donations, it is a more fulfilling idea to invest those resources in providing quality treatments at effective costs or without cost, to the needy. There is no greater service than using our professional skills to help those who require it the most.

Q6: With the demands and challenges that come with being a dentist, how do you prioritise achieving a healthy work-life balance, and what steps do you take to ensure your well-being and personal fulfilment outside of your professional responsibilities?

A6: Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is a crucial aspect of life that often takes a backseat in the relentless pursuit of monetary gains. However, in my case, I have always upheld the principle of “SUNDAYS CLOSED” since the start of my practice in 1993. This practice was further reinforced when I married my partner, Jayashree, who is also a dentist. Together, we understood the significance of prioritising family time.

As our family grew with the arrival of our second child in 2005, we made a conscious decision to dedicate only half of our Saturdays to work & spend the rest of it with our kids & each other. Additionally, we set aside two fixed periods for vacations each year: 10 days in May and 7 days in November. These dates were firmly blocked at the beginning of the year, regardless of any developments in our professional lives. We also aimed to explore new destinations with each vacation, embracing the joys of discovery and adventure.

Attending school events and actively participating in parent-teacher association meetings became non-negotiable for us. Our working hours were well managed from 9:30 to 13:30 and 16:30 to 20:00, allowing us to enjoy a family dinner together at 9 PM. We prioritised our health by engaging in morning walks, light gym sessions for an hour and a half everyday, along with maintaining a balanced & calculated diet. These practices contributed to our reasonably decent health profiles.

While pursuing my passion for lecturing, I strategically scheduled most of my assignments on weekends to minimise disruption to our family time.

The key to achieving a harmonious work-life balance lies in finding contentment with your financial well-being, practising generosity, & controlling the endless desire for more. By adopting this mindset, you will find that money naturally follows, enabling you to effectively manage the delicate balance between work & personal life.

Q7: Sir what are the major factors to be kept in consideration while setting up a successful practice?



A7: Setting up a successful dental practice requires careful consideration of several key factors. Let me enumerate some of the most important ones according to my experience:

Integrity and Ethics: Building trust with patients begins with honesty & ethical conduct. Thoroughly gathering patients' history during initial consultations is important & usually some don't pay attention to this first step. When examining their oral health, we should consider all possible treatment options and provide unbiased advice. It's essential to present multiple treatment choices, including their respective costs, without pushing for expensive options. Prioritising patient well-being over financial gain fosters transparency and instils confidence.

Workmanship: Your Skill and Knowledge are equally important. To ensure successful treatment outcomes, staying updated with the latest advancements in materials, instruments, equipment, and techniques is paramount. Investing in continuing dental education programs (CDE), workshops, & conferences allows us to enhance our skills & provide patients with the best care possible.

Visibility: While online presence is important in today's digital era, word-of-mouth referrals remain a powerful way to attract new patients. By delivering painless, durable, & long-lasting treatment solutions, we can create satisfied patients who spread positive reviews about our practice. Providing exceptional care is the key to building a strong patient base.

Investment: It's essential to invest in upgrading materials, instruments, equipment, and professional skill sets. The more we invest in our practice, the greater the potential returns. By continually improving the quality of care we offer, we enhance patient satisfaction and loyalty.

Work life balance: The delicate balance between your work and personal life, ensuring both your financial well-being and personal fulfilment, while also practising contentment, generosity, and avoiding the constant desire for more from our profession. Balance it out and give time to yourself as well as family.

Remember, establishing a successful dental practice requires a combination of ethical conduct, continuous learning, providing outstanding treatment, and strategic investments.

Q8: Dentistry, being a demanding & stressful profession, takes a toll on us physically, emotionally, and mentally. It's important to have effective stress busters to maintain our sanity. Sir, could you kindly share some of your personal stress-relief strategies that help you find balance and well-being amidst the challenges of dentistry?

A8: Dentistry, like any other profession, can indeed be demanding and place significant physical, emotional, and mental strain on us. In order to maintain my sanity and well-being, I have discovered effective stress busters that help me navigate the challenges of our field.

One of my tried-and-true methods for finding solace amidst the demands of dentistry is immersing myself in nature. Whenever I feel overwhelmed, I make it a point to spend time



outdoors, surrounded by the soothing embrace of natural beauty. Whether it's taking a leisurely stroll through a park, going for a hike in the mountains, or simply sitting under a tree, connecting with nature allows me to unwind and restore my inner balance.

Additionally, engaging in regular physical exercise has proven to be an excellent stress reliever for me. Whether it's going for a run, practising yoga, or participating in a sport, physical activity helps me release tension, clear my mind, and boost my overall well-being. The endorphins released during exercise uplift my mood and provide a much-needed escape from the pressures of work.

Lastly, finding moments of solitude and engaging in activities that bring me joy and relaxation are integral to maintaining my sanity. Whether it's indulging in any hobby, reading a captivating book, listening to music, or pursuing creative outlets, these moments of personal fulfilment help me recharge and foster a sense of inner peace.

Q9: According to you, what is the most important quality of a skilled dental surgeon?



A9: In my opinion, one of the most crucial qualities a dental surgeon should possess is the ability to be a patient listener. Regardless of how busy we may be, it is vital to understand the significance of actively listening to our patients. Many patients come to us in pain or distress, often carrying fears or phobias. By taking the time to attentively listen, we provide them with a sense of comfort and empathy. Only after patiently hearing their concerns can we then share an appropriate treatment plan. Attempting to proceed directly with injections or drilling without addressing their fears can hinder the treatment process.

Personally, I wasn't naturally inclined to be a good listener. However, I learned the importance of this skill from one of my exceptional teachers at GDC, Dr. Umarji. He emphasised the significance of being a patient listener during our initial days of diagnosis posting. From that point forward, I made a conscious effort to become a better listener. It was a gradual process that didn't yield immediate results, but eventually, I reached the destination of being a skilled listener. On a lighter note, Marriage certainly played a role in reinforcing the importance of this quality—no options to escape it anymore.

Q10: Based on your experiences and insights, what valuable tips or advice would you give to individuals who aspire to achieve success or are successful in this field of dentistry as an academician or clinician.

A10: I believe for each one I have this tip that they should remain humble and kind irrespective of being successful or not. In the Indian language, there is a saying: "Do not forget the way you came up." emphasises on the importance of remembering one's humble beginnings & staying connected to one's roots, even as we achieve success or rise in status. It serves as a reminder to remain grounded & appreciative of the journey that led to this current position, as well as to treat others with respect and empathy.

Another important saying is: "Do not stretch your legs before you are seated." Advising against being presumptuous or overconfident before achieving or completing a task. It implies the importance of patience, preparation, and ensuring a solid foundation before venturing into new endeavors or taking on additional responsibilities.

If a person can constantly remind themselves of these two sayings, it becomes natural to remain humble. I understand that every human is made of similar building blocks and, in a basic form, we aren't much different from each other. Minor differences in sociological, cultural, physiological, and socio-economic aspects place us into different categories. If one has achieved fame, success, or wealth & allows it to go to their head, they will be disliked by others. This dislike transforms into negative energy and ill wishes, which does not bode well for the future. It is always better to stay grounded, enabling connections with people from all walks of life, working harmoniously with them, and collecting good wishes that translate into good health and happiness.