

The Journal of the Michigan Dental Association

Volume 104 | Number 11

Article 3

11-1-2022

Choosing Your Next Educational Adventure: Postgraduate Programs and Creating Your Path

Partha Mukherji DDS

Private Dental Practice, Fort Worth TX, pmukherjidds@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.ada.org/journalmichigandentalassociation>



Part of the [Dental Public Health and Education Commons](#), [Health Law and Policy Commons](#), [Human Resources Management Commons](#), and the [Leadership Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mukherji, Partha DDS (2022) "Choosing Your Next Educational Adventure: Postgraduate Programs and Creating Your Path," *The Journal of the Michigan Dental Association*: Vol. 104: No. 11, Article 3. Available at: <https://commons.ada.org/journalmichigandentalassociation/vol104/iss11/3>

This Cover Story is brought to you for free and open access by the State & Local Dental Publications at ADACOMMONS. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of the Michigan Dental Association by an authorized editor of ADACOMMONS. For more information, please contact commons@ada.org.

Choosing Your Next Educational Adventure: Postgraduate Programs and Creating Your Path

By Partha Mukherji, DDS

As I approached the conclusion of dental school, I wrestled with my plans following my senior year. I recall wishing I could make my decision like the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books I read in childhood. There, I could flip the pages and see my professional journey if I chose alternate realities, commonly known these days as “events in the multiverse.”

Considerations I took into account as I faced graduation were my debt, income loss from delaying entry into practice, and the value of additional education. I remember telling myself I wanted more mentorship, more focused education in specific facets of dentistry, and experience in delivering oral health care outside the standard practice setting.

But to choose my adventure, I needed to better-understand the options for pursuing post-graduate training.

I knew I wanted to practice as a general dentist and not as a specialist, and I recognized the emerging trends for integrated health care. After lengthy contemplation, I elected to further my education with a post-graduate year in a general practice residency rather than an advanced education in general dentistry program. The difference

(Continued on Page 36)



The beauty of postgraduate education is that new dentists get to choose their own adventure, and there are many ways to blend continuing education to provide professional growth throughout their careers. Here's one dentist's journey and what he learned along the way.

Creating Your Path

(Continued from Page 34)

between the two programs was described to me in rather simplistic terms. A GPR would give one experience delivering routine dental care to medically complex patients, quite often in a hospital setting. An AEGD would give one experience treating routine practice patients with challenging and complex dental needs. Both programs share several similarities, often share similar curriculums, and are excellent choices. I knew I would benefit from training in a hospital setting to learn more about medicine, and the unique considerations for providing care in hospital. I would experience more surgeries (i.e., implants), learn IV sedation, work in operating rooms, emergency rooms, etc.

I enrolled in the GPR program at the University of Texas School of Den-

tistry-Houston, affiliated with Memorial Hermann Hospital, a level one trauma center. I was pleased to find that the general dentistry residents were held in high regard by these medical colleagues. Among my experiences as a resident, I remember taking calls (often shared with the oral and maxillofacial surgery residents), delivering care in the operating room on special care patients, training through oral surgery and anesthesiology rotations, learning IV sedation, and interacting with the AEGD residents.

Extra year a wise investment

The GPR came with a modest stipend. I realized I could live within my means and start paying down some of my educational debt, knowing that this “extra” year was a wise investment to advance my career. Pursuing a postgraduate program gave me an advantage over other candidates when I later sought employment in general practice. Employers recog-

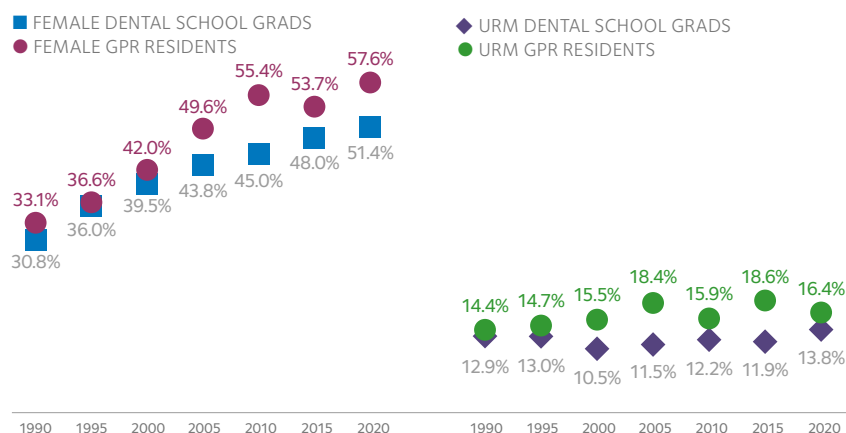
Twenty-one years later,
I’m still a huge
proponent of
postgraduate programs.
However, I’m also a
huge proponent of
“choosing your own
adventure” and creating
a track at your own
pace, should you choose
not to pursue a
postgraduate program.

nized my added skill set and the confidence I had to provide a greater scope of services, which enabled me to negotiate a better starting salary for my initial associate position. Most importantly, I felt ready to deliver high-quality care to my patients.

Twenty-one years later, I’m still a huge proponent of postgraduate programs. However, I’m also a huge proponent of “choosing your own adventure” and creating a track at your own pace, should you choose not to pursue a postgraduate program. Dental schools have the unfair task of condensing a significant volume of clinical knowledge and skills in four years. But dentistry is much more than the bread-and-butter care, and as complex as dentistry is, with all that providing oral health care entails, one can conclude that becoming “a safe beginner” is challenging to accomplish within four years. However, the burden of student debt, burnout, stress, wanting to start a family, and so on, compounds the conundrum a new dental graduate faces when considering whether to pursue another year or more of education.

My experience as a part-time fac-
(Continued on Page 38)

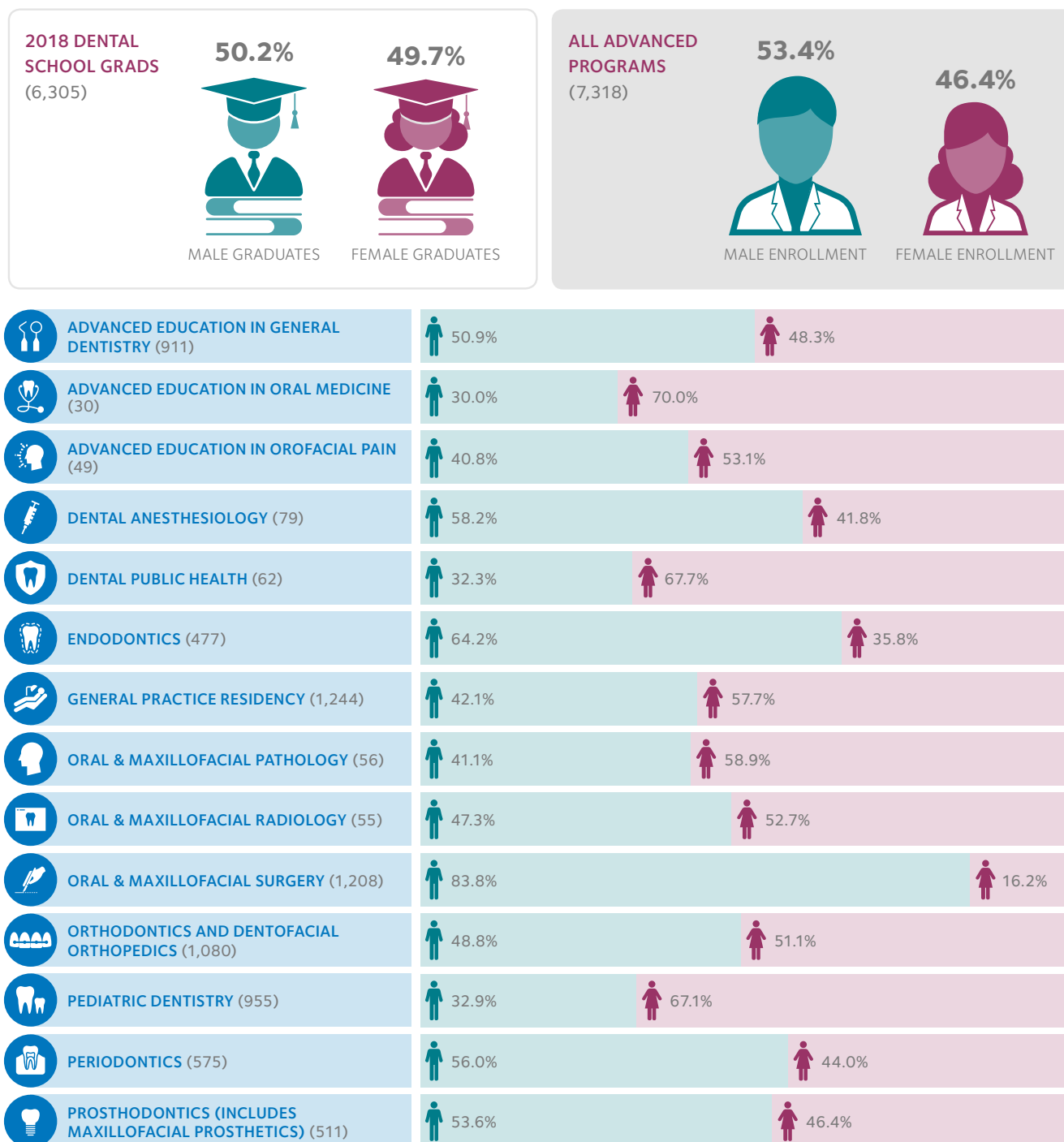
Figure 1 — Changes in GPR Enrollment 1990-2020



FEMALE AND UNDER-REPRESENTED MINORITY (URM)* GPR residents as a percentage of total enrollment have moved in different trajectories since 1990. Female enrollment increased from 33.1% to 57.6%. URM residents meanwhile have made up between 14.4% and 18.6% of GPR enrollment.

*Includes residents who identify as Black or African-American, Hispanic or Latino, or American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Figure 2 — Dental School Grads and Advanced Program Enrollment by Gender, 2018-19



Notes: Numbers in parentheses represent total number of students, residents or fellows in all accredited programs in 2018-19. Percentages may not add up to 100% where individuals were reported in the Other category, which is not shown.

Creating Your Path

(Continued from Page 36)

ulty member at Texas A&M College of Dentistry confirmed this perspective for me. I was honored to work with fourth-year students. Some students knew they wanted training beyond dental school, while others were eager to enter practice immediately following graduation and had things lined up. Some wanted to pursue a postgraduate program but couldn't, needing to generate income right away to address their educational debt and personal needs.

Whichever the circumstance, I would advise students that the beauty of education after school is that they get to choose their own adventure, and that there are many ways to blend continuing education to provide professional growth throughout their careers.

According to the ADA Health Policy Institute, although dental education debt has increased substantially in recent years, it's had only a modest association with some career choices. Policymakers could consider this when considering education debt relief.¹

Education doesn't stop

I urge dental students in the fourth year and earlier to set their own track. Find mentors, and don't be afraid to ask questions and seek information. I counsel them to identify a few areas of general dentistry that

interest them, and create a track for learning following graduation. Also, new graduates should consider education in disciplines to build confidence in delivering those services to address patient needs.

An example I provide from personal experience is that 21 years ago I wasn't fully prepared to provide rotary endodontic care, so I sought training. Whatever the path they choose, my take-home message to students and new dentists is to continue to learn. Choose the adventure that works best for your circumstances and needs. Be patient, adaptable, and take things at a manageable pace.

Following formal postgraduate education, or for those electing to hang their shingle right out of school, the educational experience doesn't stop. As clinicians, we have a professional obligation for lifelong learning. I urge recent graduates to reach out to senior colleagues in their community who exhibit exceptional skills and talent. Seek their advice, attend local dental society meetings, and join local study clubs to find mentors willing to share their strategies that placed them on a path of excellence.

Social media now provides sites for gathering of peers to exchange thoughts and advice, but the best mentors are experienced clinicians who know your community and are willing to share their wisdom and open doors to future learning. Do not miss an opportunity to establish an in-person relationship with these colleagues. Observe, and receive mentorship from

specialists. Take leadership and public speaking courses. Be open to learning from your local lab tech, an accountant, or a community business leader. Mentorship and educational opportunities come in many forms.

CE is changing

Dentistry is advancing rapidly, and so is the way continuing education is delivered. Early in my career, friends and colleagues would flood dental conferences and engage with each

Whatever the path they choose, my take-home message to students and new dentists is to continue to learn. Choose the adventure that works best for your circumstances and needs. Be patient, adaptable, and take things at a manageable pace.

other and interact with top-notch clinicians, coaches, exhibitors, and sponsors, all layered along with reunions and social engagements. Today, we have options for learning at our fingertips. YouTube and synchronous or asynchronous webinars allow us to learn at home while sitting on the couch petting the dog or baking a cake. Additionally, programs like the Kois Center, LVI, Pankey, Spear, CRA, or Levin Group offer pathways and tracks to guide implementation of their philosophy and systems into practice. Other programs deliver discipline-specific training on skills such as orthodon-

More Information on Early Practice

This article on choosing continuing education pathways is a continuation of information first presented in the December 2021 *Journal* on what practitioners may wish to consider in their first decade of practice and beyond. That article, "T+10: Creating a Foundation for Success in the First 10 Years," was written by Gabe Holdwick, DDS, and can be accessed in the *Journal* archive at michigandental.org.

tics, implant placement, restoration, and much, much more.

State and local dental societies offer excellent affordable programs presented close to home. As we emerge from the pandemic, their in-person presentations have the added value of providing the opportunity to connect and network with local colleagues. Often, these programs help members succeed by providing content targeted at complying with mandated CE for licensure. State associations, the ADA, AGD, and specialty organizations provide conferences that continue to deliver some of the highest quality, evidence-based programs and the numerous benefits and services that come with membership.

It's essential to join, support, and volunteer with these organizations that advocate for the profession and are involved in community outreach, service, research, and more. I greatly value my membership in AGD, where they hold their members accountable for obtaining high quality-focused general dental education. AGD offers track programs such as Fellow Track and Master Track that are often started in dental school, and post-grad programs that you can hop on and off at your pace and liking. AGD accepts continuing education credits ap-

proved by ADA-CERP. The honor of earning a Fellowship and Mastership in the AGD reflects one's commitment to learning and providing the best patient care.

We all have specific needs and circumstances. Considering a broad range of continuing education topics allows you to identify the facets of care that interest you and where you need to hone your skills. Choosing a track approach to address these needs provides a focus that keeps moving forward without distraction. A mentor can help coach you along the way. Beginning with a general practice residency was the right choice for me to lay a foundation for patient care informed by continued learning. As we grow in our profession, realize it is never too late to choose your next adventure! ●

Reference

1. Nasseh K, Vujicic M. The relationship between education debt and career choices in professional programs: the case of dentistry. *J Am Dent Assoc.* 2017 Nov;148(11):825-833. doi: 10.1016/j.adaj.2017.06.042. Epub 2017 Aug 23.

See the related article on
MDA continuing education,
next page.

About the Author

Partha Mukherji, DDS, is a general dentist in Fort Worth, Texas. He is a graduate of the Texas A&M College of Dentistry, and received GPR training at the UTHealth School of Dentistry in Houston. He served as adjunct assistant Professor at UT, and holds fellowships in the Academy of General Dentistry, the International College of Dentists, the International Congress of Oral Implantologists, and the American College of Dentists. He is an ADA Evidence-Based Dentistry Champion and has participated in podcasts on behalf of the ADA Center for Evidence Based Dentistry. He is a member of the Texas Dental Association's Council on Annual Meetings and Continuing Education Programs (CAMCEP) and is a member of the MDA *Journal* Editorial Advisory Board.



Mukherji



MDA HEALTH & WELL-BEING COMMITTEE

Having challenges with
**stress, anxiety,
depression, addiction...**
We can help!



517-643-4171

care@michigandental.org

www.michigandental.org/well-being



michigan dental
ASSOCIATION
YOUR CONNECTION TO ORAL HEALTH®