

# Transition Tips for New Dentistry Grads

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Jayson Nagpiing

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Author: Dr Chia-wen Yeh



In this article, Dr Chia Yeh, a dentistry graduate reflects on her experience stepping into the profession during the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic. With insights gained from personal experiences, Dr. Yeh imparts advice to new graduates, providing actionable strategies to overcome the constraints of limited clinical exposure, adeptly seek assistance when needed, foster a human-centric approach to patient care, and cultivate a harmonious 'family business' mentality within the workplace.

As a fresh graduate from the first Covid cohort, stepping into dentistry in 2021 was a shock to the system. With Covid restrictions in place at dental school, it was a far cry from the pace and reality of dentistry, and it did not provide sufficient clinical exposure to develop the required skillsets.

As with any other profession, there is a period of adjustment post-graduation. Put simply, one's attitude determines the final result. I wish I could tell my graduate self to normalise the discomfort I felt, to commit to sharing honest experiences, to give generously and not to shy away from that discomfort.

While the world was in various degrees of lockdown, I focussed on investing in my learning and remaining flexible in the aspects of dentistry I was able to practise. I was fortunate enough to have found an employer that truly wanted to provide mentorship and ensure I inherited in-house techniques developed over his 30 years in the profession.

Two years later, I am happily working in alignment with my moral compass. I am being mentored by my employer, which started out as university supervision on steroids – in a well-received way, of course. I was so glad he was willing to do the last of my deep caries debridement or would happily come into the surgery to help me secure that band over the disto-lingual corner.

That said, the transition wasn't always rainbows and sunshine. There were often tough days, if not extended periods of difficulty. Not to mention the 7pm finishes. Emotional exhaustion, patient dissatisfaction and falling short of one's own expectations all contribute to feeling like an imposter in the profession. This I can relate to all too well.

Here are three pieces of advice I wish I had known from day one:

## 1. Learn to ask for and welcome assistance.

A new graduate simply does not have the same confidence and clinical aptitude as a dentist with 30 years of experience. Instead, be realistic and allow each patient you engage with to deepen your diagnostic and restorative skillset.

Learn to confide in and seek feedback from friends, family, and colleagues. If you don't know, ask; if you can't do it, learn; once

you know, practice; if mistakes are made, rectify, and the cycle continues.

**2. Understand the importance of a human-centric workplace.**

Your employer should embody and demonstrate this value in their dental care provision. They are essentially your immediate environment and will be the main person who aids your transition. I constantly remind myself; my patients are more than just a mouth.

If I ever find myself on the brink of practising without empathy, a helpful mind-shifting sentence is - "How would I want my family or loved ones to be treated by their dentist?" I then provide treatment in that manner. Be vigilant about this, as it will become subconsciously embedded in your value system over time.

**3. Enter your workplace with a 'this is our family business' mentality.**

As you spend over 40 hours a week at work with your colleagues, you need to think about them as your second family. In addition to trying to grow your clinical skillset exponentially, it's easy to become hyper-focussed on me, myself, and I. With a 'family ownership' mentality, you invest in and appreciate your colleagues, and hold yourself accountable for upholding the workplace culture.

Finally, as a Charles Sturt Graduate (2020), I leave you with this thought:

The Wiradjuri phrase yindyamarra winhanganha means the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in. ~ Charles Sturt Ethos

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