

Exploring the Final Year of Dental Studies



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Jayson Nagpiing
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Stefan Vidimce

MIPS member and now practising dental surgeon in Southport, Queensland shares some of his experiences from his final year.

For most dental students reaching final year is a very exciting time. Greater clinical freedom, increased clinical hours, fewer lectures, and of course, the prospect of finally becoming a dentist at the end of it all are great reasons to get excited.

I can still remember eagerly awaiting the start of final year at the end of my third year and now looking back – it definitely hasn't

disappointed – for me it has easily been the best year of the whole course. But besides all the fun and enjoyment, there are still the stresses of university responsibilities, impending work applications and the need to balance a busy life.

In your final year there is definitely an increase in the amount of clinical hours. I had more or less full weeks treating patients at various clinics such as: the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne, the surrounding community clinics, the Melbourne Dental Clinic (private, university-owned clinic) and also in the rural settings of Moe and Shepparton.

The various rotations provided an excellent opportunity to hone our clinical skills and experience dealing with patients of diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The rural placements particularly stood out as they had a different feel and atmosphere and we generally saw more patients than we would have in the city. There was a group of us that lived and worked together.

Typically following clinic, we would return to our living quarters and relax into the evening by making and having dinner together, reflecting on any interesting events during the day, exploring the area or studying for exams.

Final year may bring less intense assessment than previous years; however exams are still difficult as we are expected to know and understand all the material from the start of the course, plus much more. This makes sense, as we will be working autonomously as health practitioners by the end of the year – which is why a significant part of my free time was still spent revising notes. Superimposed on top of my university responsibilities were my retained duties as a sponsorship officer for the Melbourne Dental Students' Society.

I was involved in communicating with existing and potential partners regarding sponsorships through lots of emails and meetings. At times it got hectic with all the additional work but nevertheless it was a great way to network, and a great experience overall to be part of a committee of like-minded individuals striving to provide an enhanced dental school experience for our colleagues and classmates.



It's no secret that finding a job in today's competitive market is more difficult than it has been in the past and this has been a major theme in my final year.

In my opinion, it's fair to say that getting the dream job is unlikely first year out – our horizons will need to stretch towards rural areas usually. And we need to find ways to differentiate ourselves from the rest of the crowd. On my days off and during university

breaks I often observed specialists, from all dental fields, both in private and public practice – many clinicians will be welcoming as long as you show interest and respect and ask nicely!

This was an invaluable learning experience that greatly enhanced my clinical knowledge and confidence, but also provided opportunity to meet other people directly working in the profession.

I highly recommend this path to gain more experience and build on knowledge. Towards the end of the year, I started applying for jobs that I found most suitable, such as those that provided mentorship and good clinical experience. That information was difficult to find at times, hence why networking and keeping an eye out on various platforms such as websites, social media, word-of-mouth and the Australian Dental Association was important.

But there is always time for fun! Throughout the year, I always tried to fit in time with friends and balanced it out with some 'down-time' for myself. At the beginning of August I volunteered with the Teddy Bear Hospital at Chadstone Shopping Centre – this proved to be a fun event where I familiarised children with the dental environment by treating their teddy bears' 'dental problems'.

To unwind, I spent time at a nearby gym and spent time with friends on weekends. The social events organised by the student committee were also great and served as a way of getting out of the dentistry bubble in which we as dental students so often become lost.

So in conclusion, this has been the best year in dentistry so far, so to any dental students about to start final year in 2016, there's a lot to look forward to! It's easy to become consumed with the new responsibilities of being a student dentist, but I'd encourage people to be active and make the most of an already great year.

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