The dental spa with sparkle

Versha Miyanger speaks to Sunita Verma from the exceptional and award winning Sparkle Dental Boutique on her work ethics, ambitions and how she created a truly outstanding dental spa.

VM: Can you tell me a bit about your background and qualifications?

SV: I qualified from Guy's Hospital in 1990 and entered into a year's vocational training in Hounslow, Middlesex. I will be forever grateful to Dr Davinderpal Kooner, who was my mentor and trainer in that first year. He helped me understand that you have to have your heart in what you do and helped to mentor and guide me to having excellent clinical skills.

VM: When and why did you become a practice owner?

SV: I loved practising dentistry and worked as an associate for seven years in a few practices in West London. During this time, I had absolutely no intention or desire of ever owning my own practice. I loved my life as an associate and enjoyed the freedom this allowed to pursue my other passions in life.

In 1997, my uncle told me about a dental practice that had come on sale near where he lived. There was little interest in the practice from anyone else and I ended up buying it! Once I became a principal, I began to relish my new role and it's many demands. Thus started a journey of learning and continually improving my dentistry and practice.

VM: How did you build your business?

SV: I started the two surgery practice (then known as The Smile Centre) single handedly in 1997. It was a largely NHS practice with a dwindling patient base and a need of modernisation. I had little funds, so with a simple lick of paint and basic leaflets produced in house, I started to see patients. The practice grew quickly and within 6 months I took on a full time associate.

By 2000, the practice expanded further. With a team of nine including 3 associates, we provided dental services 6 days a week, 2 evening a week and were booked 4 weeks in advance. Our main growth was through building a good reputation and word of mouth referrals.

My sister Kavita Verma, joined the practice in 2003 and together we implemented Investors in People and BDA Good Practice, as a framework to develop strategies to improve the performance of the practice and the team.

In 2007, we became Sparkle Dental Boutique. I have never taken on a marketing or PR person, but have had Kavita to carry out most of our marketing activities for us. With the new practice it was important to promote and establish the new brand both within the practice and externally. Kavita wrote and implemented a marketing strategy which in-
cluded writing/organising all our adverts, advertorials, press releases, brochures, newsletters, direct mails and so on. Kavita even took Sparkle into cyberspace by writing the text for the website and sourced all our website images, as an important communication and promotional tool to sell what we do.

The practice refurbishment, prominent signage and an inviting entrance has resulted in a 500% increase in new patients coming into the practice just by walking or driving by. Again the major factor in growing the practice has been through our word of mouth referrals. We treat patients with respect, dignity and compassion and this is the single most important factor in the success of what is now a multi-award winning practice.

**VM:** Why did you decide to concentrate on aesthetics?

**SV:** My passion for cosmetic dentistry goes back as far as my days as a dental student. I was lucky enough to have treated a patient who had severe teeth wear due to a medical condition. This was a large restorative/aesthetic case and the patient required a full mouth reconstruction, quite a feat for me! After graduating, I worked as an associate in an NHS practice for many years with no scope for cosmetic dentistry. During this time I regularly attended courses and lectures that fuelled my interest for this type of work.

**VM:** What training have you undertaken apart from University?

**SV:** I have been inspired by many world renowned dentists and have taken numerous hands on courses on aesthetic dentistry, smile design, photography, facial aesthetics and occlusion. I have regularly attended BACD conferences and the World Aesthetic Congress. Currently, I am working towards attaining the BACD Accreditation.

**VM:** What is the most satisfying aspect of your work?

**SV:** I love the artistry and intricacy involved in aesthetic dentistry and I get the best feeling when my patients are happy with the end results of what my team and I have created. It’s often an emotional journey for the patients as dissatisfaction with their smile has often held them back. It’s great to know that our efforts improve the quality of their lives. Patient testimonials and feedback encourages my team and I to continue to improve and serve our patients in the best way we can.

**VM:** What about your practice do you think is unique?

**SV:** To me ‘Everything Matters’ and I have planned each aspect of the practice to have a uniqueness...from the practice name, to the patient journey, to the business aspect of running the practice, to the team and beyond.

Why Sparkle? Sparkle is a term synonymous with the dental industry with phrases such as ‘sparkling white teeth’ and together with our straplines of ‘your smile is precious’ and ‘live life. enjoy. sparkle’, both lend themselves to creative marketing ideas.

The look, feel and innovative design of the boutique was a critical part of our marketing strategy and therefore great effort has been made to create a chic dental environment. From the entrance to the building which provided an opportunity to create a strong visual identity for Sparkle, to the interiors much like those found in a jeweller’s, to the private relaxation room, to the oversize bathroom and not forgetting the brushed stainless steel water feature in our courtyard garden we have created an oasis of calm and relaxation.

Sparkle is the also the first practice in the UK to have the Adec rear delivery unit with nurses console operating from two interconnecting rooms, allowing forehanded dentistry to be a reality. I am able to carry out a tooth whitening procedure from one room whilst continuing normal surgery in the adjacent room, maximising efficiency and profitability.

Last but not least, I am really proud of my small team. We are highly responsive and we go the extra mile for our patients as well as each other. Sparkle is one of a few practices to achieve the Investors in People and BDA Good Practice award and using these two schemes, my team work together to meet our practice goals.

**VM:** Professionally what are you most proud of?

**SV:** I have trained in the use of botox and fillers but have not incorporated it into my practice as yet. My first passion and expertise lies in dentistry and I do not want to dilute this. I feel treatments like botox and fillers are a specialised treatment and should be administered by an expert in this field and therefore if I do incorporate this service into the practice in the future, I will bring on board a specialist so that we can work in tandem.
SV: I would say I am most proud of the clinical work that my team and I carry out on a day to day basis which changes the lives of the people that we care for. I am also proud of having the courage of developing Sparkle a fully private practice in what is predominantly an NHS area. On completing the practice, the recognition that we have received from fellow colleagues has been incredible.

The Probe Awards
Winner: Best Practice Environment 2007
Private Dentistry Awards
Winner: Most Attractive Practice 2007
Private Dentistry Awards
Runner Up: Most Innovative Practice 2007
Private Dentistry Awards
Finalist: Best Marketing 2007
Private Dentistry Awards
Highly Commended: Practice of the Year 2007
The Dentistry Awards
Winner: Best Practice London 2007
The Dentistry Awards
Finalist: Best Private Website 2007

VM: What has been your biggest challenge?

SV: Building a niche private practice in a traditionally NHS area was a risky strategy. To create what I had envisioned for the practice, I took the very difficult decision of not renewing my NHS contract, I said goodbye to my two associates and became a single handed practitioner again after eight years!

The building went through its own makeover but this was also fraught with setbacks, the most challenging being the builders leaving the project halfway through the year, leaving us working on a building site!

VM: What do you think is the future of aesthetic dentistry?

SV: There is a growing trend for this type of work with patients of all ages coming to Sparkle asking for ways in which their smiles can be improved. People want to look and feel good and the materials and techniques are getting more sophisticated, allowing this demand to be met.

VM: What are your top tips in maintaining a successful aesthetic practice?

SV:
1. The practice environment is the first tangible thing that patients make a judgement on regarding the standard of your cosmetic dentistry. The entrance of the practice must be inviting, with good quality well displayed signage. The interior must be immaculate at all times.
2. Your team should be well presented with a smart uniform, name badges and they must be friendly, caring, knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Ideally they should have aesthetically pleasing smiles. All my team have had their teeth whitened and they are all able to explain any cosmetic procedure to patients.
3. Good quality photographs of your own before and after cases is crucial in communicating the benefits of cosmetic dentistry to
patients. Start to create your own portfolio of beautiful smiles and display them in waiting areas and treatment rooms. We have a nicely presented photobook of cases with testimonials, reinforcing trust and quality to patients. Photographs are vital in communication with your laboratory for this type of dentistry.

4. Ask open ended questions about your patients' cosmetic concerns and really listen to the emotional reasons behind their enquiry i.e. how does it make them feel and how would they feel if you could give them the smile of their dreams. This is the crux of patients buying cosmetic treatments from you.

5. Work with a laboratory that produces excellent work and who you feel comfortable to communicate with.

6. Critique your own work, share and exchange information with your peers and continue on a life-long journey of learning, improving and being inspired through post graduate courses.

7. Your website, its content and feel should demonstrate that you provide cosmetic procedures...plenty of images, not overloaded with text and a gallery of your own before and after cases with patient testimonials.

8. Don’t be the best kept secret in town! Tell everyone about your services through internal and external marketing activities.