

A Recent Dental Graduate Figuring out Life

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There is no structure in my days, well not yet I hope. Do I want that structure? I don't even know. The reason why I say not yet is because somewhere deep down I want that structure back in my life. There used to be classes to attend on time, doors to enter or leave to the sound of bells, schedules to fulfil with deadlines. Sometimes I wish it had remained because it felt as if I was more in control and I had things to do when I needed to. Then sometimes I feel grateful that it is all over for now. I know all those 5 and half years of dental school were the preparation for this, the graduation and the life that came with it. As much as I was excited to get out of college and to enter independent practice, I was equally devastated thinking how I was going to handle my patients, try to address and solve their problems without my seniors or residents or professors and teachers around me.

You are now a doctor, like all of them, but you are yet to know, even know five percent of what they know. This thought in itself was scary, yet exciting and freeing, all at the same time. How will I fit in? How will I know it all when a patient presents with a problems I haven't come across before? Well, knowing is the hard part. Or will it be challenging yet exciting, for I might unfold the parts of myself I never knew existed.

It's not just the proper way to talk with or consult a patient, but also the right way to extract a tooth. From smiling and greeting a patient to obturating

right. From comforting a scared child to giving her a glove balloon at the end of treatment. Everything was a process, the process of knowing and figuring how it is done. Whether it was from the memories of how the residents did it, or how you saw your professor did when you sneaked in to assist, or the way you did it during your internship where you messed up so badly you would never do it again.

Because now, there will be no scolding from seniors or professors or them correcting things that you couldn't do. So as Taylor swift rightfully said "you are on your own, kid".

You are on your own, kid. And now, the two faces of this phrase

Happy:

Wow, now I am on my own. No need to wait for my turn, no need to wait for chairs, no need to search for patients for exams or assessments, no need for approvals or permissions.

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Sad (or rather, scary):

Well, I honestly took the numbers and social media handles of every postgraduate resident so that when I graduate and go into my own practice, I could contact them and ask for their guidance whenever I needed it. Just by doing that, I thought I would survive being on my own, even though it was kind of sad and scary.

Short story time, my first time extracting a root canal treated tooth outside my dental school.

It was the right mandibular first molar. While luxating, the crown broke off and I panicked. If I were in college, my first response would have been “*Dd, dai aidinu na ekchoti herdinuna please.*” But now, I was all I had. So, I thought to myself, “*what dai or dd would have done in this situation?*”. So, with a long breathe, I did what they would have done-sectioning of the root, and extraction of both the root pieces. Done and dusted.

The first time this happened, it felt so fulfilling and grateful because I did have the skill to do it myself but had not realized it yet. So, the next time I broke a root in an upper molar, I didn’t panic as much. I

almost called my professor to help me out, but I stopped myself. I asked what my professor would have done, and I did just that. After a couple of tries and cleaning the visual field with cotton and trying again and again, the distal broken root of upper second molar was out too. A breath of sigh, relief and fulfillment again!

The skills I have learned and fostered have brought me these small moments of joy because it made me realize that, I could be of help to someone in pain and could bring them relief. I could send them back with a little glimpse of smile rather than the frown of pain and worry they had when they walked in. As the saying goes, “*one smile can be the reason for many other smiles.*” A small effort with good intention can be a wave for happiness. For all that, I feel grateful every single day.

I know there is still a very long way to go, millions of things to learn and do. But for now, I am a recent graduate, a dental surgeon figuring out life in this country going through transformation of its own.

