

A Successful Multirole Orthodontist Shares His Experience

In 2022, there are approximately 2,700 dentists in Hong Kong¹, among which 73 hold an orthodontic qualification.²

Orthodontics is a specialty field in dentistry that deals with the misalignment of teeth and jaw that might cause eating or speech problems. Orthodontists provide patients with treatments which can slowly change and correct the positioning of their teeth and jaw, making them straighter. The treatments not only help to improve cosmetic appearance, they can also help boost self-esteem and reduce the chance of damage to protruding front teeth.³



¹ “Dental Care Services, Review of Oral Health Goals and Relevant Staffing Proposal .” *Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region - Panel on Health Services (Agenda) 13 May 2022*, Legislative Council Panel on Health Services, May 2022, <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr2022/english/papers/hs/papers/hs20220513cb4-347-3-e.pdf>.

² “Orthodontics 牙齒矯正科 No. of Specialist Dentists ... - Dchk.org.hk.” *List of Specialist Registration of the Dental Council of Hong Kong*, The Dental Council of Hong Kong, https://www.dchk.org.hk/docs/SA_Orthodontics.pdf.

³ Mandal, Dr. Ananya. “What Is Orthodontics?” *News Medical Life Sciences*, 28 June 2019, <https://www.news-medical.net/health/What-is-Orthodontics.aspx>.

In order to become an orthodontist, extra years of studying and training are required after one qualifies as a general dentist.

Dr X is one of the most prominent and experienced orthodontic specialists in Hong Kong. I had the honour of speaking to him about his path to becoming an orthodontist, his experience as a private dental practitioner and his passion for teaching. He had kindly provided advice for students who are interested in dentistry.

Why do you want to be an orthodontist?

Dr X: My father was a doctor. This is why I want to be a medical professional myself. I, however, prefer to be a dentist because the working hours are more stable. My interest in wire bending led me to specialise in orthodontics. Compared to general dentists or other dental specialists, orthodontists deal with cleaner teeth and less blood in their work.

What education and training did you receive to become an orthodontist?

Dr X: I went to the UK to study for my A-Levels around 1970. I then got into King’s College London and got my Bachelor of Dental Surgery degree. I qualified as a general dentist after completing some basic training.

To become an orthodontist, I studied for another two years to obtain a postgraduate diploma in orthodontics, completed my housemanship in hospitals, and passed examinations.

What did you do after being qualified as an orthodontist?

Dr X: After being qualified, I worked in the UK for a while and came back to Hong Kong. The University of Hong Kong (HKU) set up

the Faculty of Dentistry in 1982 and I was one of the first batch of lecturers. I like to teach as I want to pass on my knowledge to the next generation, leaving a legacy.



HKU Dentistry
Faculty of Dentistry · The University of Hong Kong
香港大學牙醫學院

I studied on a part-time basis for a PhD in order to become a professor. Unfortunately, when I got my PhD in 1992, there were no openings for professors at the dental school of HKU. Given that there were no other dental schools in Hong Kong and I did not want to go elsewhere, I went into private practice.

I kept teaching undergraduates and postgraduates on a part-time basis after setting up my private practice. There was no formal specialist training in Hong Kong in the 1980s. I was involved in setting up the training programme for dental specialists under the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine. There are eight dental specialties, and each requires six years of training, same as our medical counterparts.



“Diagram showing the training process to get a specialist title” Lai, Professor Paul. *Career Advancement Support*, Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, 2021, [https://www.hkam.org.hk/sites/default/files/PDFs/\(2021\)%20HA%20website_VP\(EE\)_HA%20Career%20Talk%20\(draft\)%20%5BPL%20edits%5D.pdf](https://www.hkam.org.hk/sites/default/files/PDFs/(2021)%20HA%20website_VP(EE)_HA%20Career%20Talk%20(draft)%20%5BPL%20edits%5D.pdf). Accessed 7 July 2022.

I am now an Honorary Clinical Professor, mainly giving students training on dental treatments. I do both lectures to large classes of students and small group teaching for less than ten students. I do not plan to pursue a career higher up on the academic hierarchy as I enjoy patient-facing work.

Can you tell me more about setting up and running your own private practice?

Dr X: One needs a clinic license for running a private practice. Running a clinic requires you to (1) rent a place, (2) buy equipment and materials, and (3) employ staff, including a receptionist and nurses. Some dentists employ associates or get partners to work together in a clinic, but I prefer working alone.

Clinical skills and patient management skills are important. I have seen all sorts of patients, including some who were very demanding and some who were psychologically unstable. I had to work out a way to pacify them.

I need to keep my knowledge up to date too. An orthodontist needs to fulfil the Continuing Medical Education and Continuous Professional Development (CME/CPD) requirement in order to maintain a specialist title. The minimum CME/CPD requirement is 90 hours in a three-year cycle. There are several categories of accredited activities, such as attending lectures, teaching and publication.

At the beginning, it was hard to earn a living running my private practice. However, as my income increased and became more stable, I could cut down my working hours and spend more time with my family.

Besides teaching and treating patients, is there anything else you do as an orthodontist?

Dr X: I actively participate in various dental and orthodontic organisations, including the Hong Kong Dental Association, the Dental

Council of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Society of Orthodontists. I had been a council member or a President in some of these organisations. I was also once appointed by a Hong Kong Governor to be a board member of the Prince Philip Dental Hospital.



As a result of the SARS pandemic in 2003, Hong Kong's economy went downhill. I represented the Hong Kong dental profession in discussions related to the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA). Under CEPA, the Mainland has agreed to provide preferential treatment to the Hong Kong dental profession to work in the Mainland.

Being a senior orthodontist, I have acted as an expert witness and prepared expert reports for use in court. For example, a person lost many of his teeth in a traffic accident. I, as an expert witness, have to assess the cost of repair to get that person back to near normal. Expert reports are factual and have to be backed up by references.

Lastly, I have published 28 articles internationally and have co-authored a book.

Apart from dental-related work, I like volunteering for NGOs, like the Rotary Club. I was also once a Commander of the Hong Kong Road Safety Patrol.

What advice would you give students who want to be a dentist?

Dr X: To be a dentist, you have to be knowledgeable and have good communication skills. You need to have a passion for patients, listen to them and do not overpower them. Patients should have the right to choose what they want. Also, you need to have good manual dexterity as you have to work with precision on a very small scale.

Interview by Evelyn Lee