

SPECIAL FEATURE

Across the pond: BDS to DDS

By Dr Karishma Manji

BDS, DDS, DMD... What's the difference? A dentist is a dentist, right? Well simply put, no. The BDS degree is only valid in certain countries, and the USA is not one of them.

I graduated from King's College London in 2016 with my BDS, and during my DFT year, I married my soulmate who is from the US. We both currently live in the UK, but have decided to ultimately settle down across the pond, where I intend to pursue my passion and my career.

When making this decision, I learned that being a dentist in the US requires a further 2-3 years of training at a US accredited dental school. Slightly taken aback at first, I spoke to Professor Rekow, Executive Dean at King's, who inspired me to pursue my journey with her similar life story. I was also fortunate enough to receive great guidance from a former King's student who had personal experience with this conversion process. Having successfully passed the National Board Dental Exams Part 1 and 2 and the TOEFL, I am currently amidst applications to the US dental schools.

In this article, I hope to explain the basic conversion process, so you can have a broader understanding of what it entails. Whether you choose to be a general dentist or a practising specialist, you still have to obtain a DDS from an accredited dental school to practise in the US.

1. Familiarise yourself with the American Dental Association (ADA) Foreign Trained Dentist programmes, also called 'Advanced Standing Programs'. These usually require completion of a two-year programme at a limited number of US accredited dental schools which use the ADEA CAAPID application system. Some schools which do not use this system offer a three-year programme. Be sure to also check the specific licensure requirements for the state you wish to live and work in after dental school.
2. Standardised Tests and Reports
The National Board Dental Examinations (NBDE or 'The Boards') are exams which

are taken by every US graduating dentist. Usually, a US dental student would take Part 1 after their second year at dental school, and Part 2 toward the end of their final year. Foreign-trained dentists are expected to pass these before entering the Advanced Standing Programs.

I took six months away from practice, to focus solely on studying for these extremely arduous examinations.

- NBDE Part 1. An 8-hour exam which must be taken in the US, Canada, Puerto Rico or Guam, and covers: Anatomy (Whole Body), Biochemistry, Microbiology/ Pathology, and Dental Anatomy. The depth of certain topics here is different to what

most of us learned at dental school, and their dental anatomy facts are quite specific (ie knowing which cusp ridge is longer on each tooth, where the heights of contour are located on each tooth, etc)

- NBDE Part 2: A 14-hour long exam, split over two days. This exam covers restorative dentistry, periodontics, pedodontics, orthodontics, radiology, oral surgery and oral pathology
 - TOEFL: No matter if you are a UK citizen or attended a UK dental school, you still must take this two-hour test to prove you can read, listen, speak and write English. Thankfully, this test can be taken in the UK
 - ECE: Obtaining an official transcript of your scores from dental school, signed by the dean
 - Letters of Evaluation: I cannot thank my professors enough for these!
 - Personal Statement: Similar to UCAS: why you want to do the programme.
3. Each school has specific criteria, ie being a US citizen at the time of application,



or completing specific questionnaires.

I am in the pipeline to get my green card through my husband, which is one way of becoming a permanent resident. Otherwise, you would apply for a student visa to study abroad.

4. Fees: A simple exam can cost you \$500 plus flights, and another \$500 of prep material. It all adds up. Plus, each year at dental school is on average \$80,000. It is a costly process.
5. Interview and bench test: The final stages!

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6. Starting the programme: most programmes start between January-July of the year following your application. There is tough competition, with on average only 20 spaces per school, and over 1,000 applicants.

It is no mean feat, but if you have the passion, and a burning desire to move abroad, this is your opportunity!

Dentistry in the US has slightly different views and practice compared to us in the UK but overall, a mouth is a mouth, a tooth is a tooth, and caries is caries. We have to continue to combat disease regardless of where we are: one mouth, one tooth, one cavity at a time!

Here is a great link from the American Student Dental Association which describes the process and has links to relevant resources: www.asdanet.org/index/dental-student-resources/tips-for-international-dental-students.

Feel free to reach out to me for any help or advice along the way, and good luck with all your endeavours! karishma.a.manji@gmail.com. ■