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Pearls of Wisdom

Dr. Peter Flaherty of **Main Line Smile** reflects on his learnings from 30-plus years of restoring, enhancing, and protecting patients' smiles. by **Bill Donahue** | Photos by **Jeff Anderson**

Anyone who devotes more than three decades of his life to a particular vocation is bound to absorb a vast amount of knowledge. For some, however, spending so much time rooted in one place, honing one's skills in a precise line of work, would engender feelings of boredom or contempt, if not the desire to move on to something else.

Peter Flaherty, D.M.D., the owner of Main Line Smile, has a different take. His interest in his work has only grown since 1993, the year he founded his Devon-based dentistry practice.

"I went to college with every intention of going to medical school," says Dr. Flaherty, a native of the Boston area who studied biology at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. "I was always good with my hands and always wanted to be a clinician of sorts, but by the time I got to junior year, I was disillusioned [about a career in medicine]. I thought: *What do I do now?* Then I had an epiphany: *What about dentistry?*"

He applied to dental school and promptly earned acceptance to Temple University's Kornberg School of Dentistry. He took to dentistry like a duck to water. "It was not like work at all," he



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MAIN LINE SMILE

recalls. After graduation, he chose to stay in the Philadelphia area and spent two years working as an associate dentist with other practices before forging his own path.

With Main Line Smile, Dr. Flaherty leads a long-tenured team that caters to virtually any dental need, be it primary and preventative care, such as routine cleanings and cavity fillings, or restorative dentistry, such as bridges, crowns, veneers, and dental implants. In addition, Main Line Smile provides orthodontic care through clear-aligner therapy and cosmetic services such as teeth whitening and deep bleaching.

Over the years Dr. Flaherty has learned a lot about himself, as a clinician, as a businessperson, and as a leader. Chief among them: Stay true to yourself.

“A practice ends up being a reflection of the person in charge,” he says. “For me, it was all about the Golden Rule, treating people how I would want caregivers to treat me. We’re not a hard-sell practice, and we have next to no staff turnover; some of my people have been with me for decades, and patients really appreciate that kind of consistency.

“As a clinician,” he continues, “you have to understand that a lot of people are afraid of going to the dentist. You have to listen to them, lay out a treatment plan for them, and say, ‘Here’s what’s going on, and here are the solutions. How would you like to proceed?’ We’re never judgmental, so we’ll work with you if you need to move forward with treatment a little bit at a time. Nobody will ever get a surprise bill from us.”

While Dr. Flaherty specializes in restorative and cosmetic dentistry, he also enjoys preventative dentistry. The comprehensive nature of his practice has served him well throughout his career, particularly during

the downturns following the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Had I built my career just around cosmetic cases, I would have been in trouble,” he admits. “The rainy days will come, like the ones we saw in 2008 and 2020. We were closed for three months [after March 2020], but we got through it. Now, post-pandemic, we’re busier than we’ve ever been.”

Dr. Flaherty attributes the practice’s long track record of success to the fact that he takes genuine pleasure from helping others. He finds it particularly rewarding when he’s able to treat generations of families.

“Maybe it’s Pollyanna to say by today’s standards, but impacting someone’s life in a positive way never gets old,” he says. “It’s remarkable to me to think about the generational aspects of what I do. First I treated Mr. Jones, and then I treated his kids, and now I’m treating *their* kids. I love having that kind of trust from a family, that kind of continuity.”

Dentistry has undergone periods of profound change over the years, particularly in the past decade. Be it new technology, new clinical techniques, or new ideas for running the practice, Dr. Flaherty believes that, in order to excel over the long term in any facet of health care, a clinician must commit to “learning all the time.”

“The rate at which things are changing today is not exponential, but it’s getting there,” he adds. “If you told 26-year-old me I’d be doing the things I’m doing now—doing digital impressions, milling crowns out of zirconia—I wouldn’t have believed it. But here we are.”

The latest step forward: artificial intelligence as a tool to enable more accurate diagnosis and treatment. While Dr. Flaherty hasn’t yet incorporated AI into his practice, he has begun exploring its use to determine

whether or not it would benefit his patients.

“There’s a fine line there,” he says. “It’s always good to investigate new technology, but I tend to adopt something only when it has a track record. I’m intrigued by AI for radiographs. The early word is that it can help cut down on false positives. One day it will probably be the standard.”

As Dr. Flaherty reflects on the past 30-plus years, during which he has become one of the region’s respected general and cosmetic dentists, he also thinks about the future. He’s not mulling retirement, nor does he have grand plans for expansion. Rather, he intends to follow the same path that has served him so well for so long.

“We’re honest brokers,” he says of Main Line Smile. “You have dental problems, and we have dental solutions. We’re an established practice that has earned a reputation for excellence. One of the benefits of having a practice like that is that we don’t have to spend a lot of effort on marketing, because people talk when they have a good experience.

“It may sound simple,” he continues, “but my goal is to continue to grow the practice and take good care of people. What I’ve learned is that people are the reason I’ve done this for so long; the relationships with patients and staff are what I’d miss the most if I had to give it up. Even after 30 years, they’re the reason I still love what I do.” ■

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