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**Dr. Jay Patel and Gopi Rohat**, the founders of Philadelphia's **Danta Dental**, have devoted their lives to "breaking down barriers," enhancing smiles, and inspiring others to find success.



# No Obstacles

by **Bill Donahue** | photos by **Sweet Caribbean Photo**

**The relationship between Jay Patel, D.M.D., and Gopi Rohat began as a cross-country friendship that later blossomed into a love story for the ages. It also produced a flourishing business partnership that could one day extend much farther than its roots in Philadelphia.**

"Dr. Jay," as many patients know him, and Gopi first met through a dating app in June 2017. At the time, he was living in a small Pennsylvania town near Scranton, and she was living not far from Redding, a small city in Northern California.

"The time difference between us put a big hold on things," she recalls. "Jay was early into his career [as a dentist] and I was running the family business and planning to move forward with a big hotel project in Atlanta. Before I met Jay, I thought I'd have an empire of hotels one day."

They met face to face for the first time in September of that year, in New York City, where Dr. Jay was completing his residency. By the beginning of 2020, they were making big plans together—namely, a wedding and a business partnership that would eventually lead to their own dental practice, Danta Dental, in Center City Philadelphia.

"I grew up following Philly sports—I was a diehard—but I never knew I'd end up in Philly," Dr. Jay admits. "I applied to Temple's dental school but wound up going to [the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine] because I loved Pitt's campus. I came here for an opportunity to start my career, and I'm so thankful I did because I get to live and work in a city I truly enjoy."

Danta Dental provides the full scope of dentistry services (general, family, and cosmetic) and oral surgery. Dr. Jay has particular interest in surgical procedures such as extractions, soft-tissue and bone grafting, and full-mouth restorations, as

well as veneers and Invisalign. "Hours and hours" of continuing education enable him to continually add to his areas of expertise.

While the practice has become known for delivering exceptional clinical results, its commitment to "excellence of care" begins long before a patient takes a seat in the dentist's chair. Dr. Jay and Gopi have cultivated a team-based ecosystem, where each team member—from the front desk to the clinical staff—is prized and prioritized. Their thinking: "We put the team first so they can put the patient first."

Getting Danta Dental off the ground took some doing. The COVID-19 pandemic "put a huge wrench" in Jay and Gopi's plans, but a strong work ethic and a clear-eyed plan helped them overcome every obstacle.

"When we first started this practice, we were working until 10 or 11 at night and then coming back early in the morning," Gopi says. "We didn't end up killing each other, so that was a good sign. We established a concrete foundation, and now we're seeing the fruits of our hard work."



Dr. Jay Patel



Gopi Rohat



were happy to see he's in remission."

### A Light for Others to Follow

While Gopi had no prior direct experience in dentistry or health care, her creativity and tenacity, as well as her hospitality background, have served her well. For example, she devised Danta Dental's unique identity, which pays homage to the founders' shared Indian heritage and speaks to the strength of their partnership.

"We wanted something different," she says. "Danta is a Sanskrit word for tooth, which is the foundation of what we do. If you look closely at our logo, you'll see an elephant with tusks in the shape of a tooth. The elephant is considered very prosperous in our culture, and the elephant tusk has the strongest bone density of any bone. It has a lot of meaning for us."

Gopi grew up watching her father, a self-made entrepreneur originally from India,

### A Partnership of Equals

Dr. Jay and Gopi are equal partners in the practice, each complementing the other very well. He leads the clinical side of the practice, while she takes care of the nonclinical aspects. Whereas he tends to be more grounded and circumspect, she is fiery and adventurous. Together, they form an unbeatable team—balanced, focused, and committed to maintaining a culture of positivity for patients and team members alike.

"Gopi has helped me push boundaries and push through barriers," says Dr. Jay, Danta Dental's president of clinical affairs. "I tend to overanalyze, and at times it's held me back. Between her free nature and my more analytical nature, we balance each other out."

They also have fierce respect for one another. In addition, they share a devotion to "breaking down barriers" and undoing the generational patterns that hold back some husband-and-wife tandems.

"We wanted to break the stigma surrounding husbands and wives who work together, where the female is considered 'just the help,'" says Gopi, the practice's vice president of nonclinical affairs. "Ours is an equal partnership, and that's as true at work as it is at home. It's common for a wife to take her husband's last name. We never wanted to have a role in that, which is why we both kept our last names, our own identities. We

don't really believe in specific gender roles; even at home, Jay does most of the cooking."

Dr. Jay's interest in health care began at an early age, though he initially thought he would follow in the footsteps of his physician father. The opportunity to work with an oral surgeon and pediatric dentist put him on the path to dental school.

"I wanted to have a lasting impact in people's lives," he says. "I'm able to take someone out of pain and help them take a step forward by creating a new aesthetic result. That's what solidified dentistry for me. I feel so rewarded by seeing someone smile and watching their self-esteem grow."

Dr. Jay enjoys the work so much, he says he would provide care for free if money was no object. He cites one patient who needed an extraction and other dental work ahead of his upcoming chemotherapy and radiation to treat a malignant tumor.

"It was right when we bought this office, and there was no way to accommodate him as part of our regular schedule, so we came in on our personal time," Dr. Jay recalls, adding that the practice covered the cost of the dental treatment so the patient could focus solely on his cancer fight. "We took care of him and got him out of pain, cleared him for treatment, and sent him on his way. ... We just saw him last week and

build his hotel business through sleepless nights and personal sacrifices—long days doing everything from folding towels and making beds to cleaning pools and mechanical maintenance. From her father, Gopi learned invaluable lessons in hard work, financial independence, and measured risk. She eventually took over the business from him, with visions of building "a small empire."

Now, with Danta Dental, she and Dr. Jay are working together to build a different kind of empire. They intend to add an associate dentist so the practice can offer its distinctive brand of dentistry to more patients who live and work in Center City. They also envision growth beyond the walls of the Philadelphia location—expansion to Chicago, perhaps, or Northern California, near Gopi's family.

"Our goal is to inspire people, and to show them that success does not have to come a certain way," she says. "We want people to know there are different ways of finding success. We're here to provide a light for others to follow." ■

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