



"I see myself mentoring and helping as many people as I can to deliver fantastic results for their patients, through both skill in business and their practices."

**DR VANDANA
KATYAL**



As someone who loves learning and challenges, Dr Vandana Katyal has gone from strength to strength as she's transitioned to founder of the very first dual-accredited orthodontics college in Australia and the UK.

A class act

Like it or not, over the course of time, your career is going to change. Even if you stay chairside, doing what you've always done, the world will change around you.

Technology, society, and knowledge will all morph and adjust to each other. The challenge is finding the best way to adapt to it all. Dr Vandana Katyal can tell you all about that. She's been through some big changes, and has discovered what you need to do, and who you need beside you while you negotiate those changes.

From qualifying as a dentist, then a specialist orthodontist, her career focus has shifted towards mentoring and education, having started BOSS Digital Orthodontic College. "I've gone from a clinical orthodontist to now having the first dual-accredited orthodontics college, founded by an orthodontist, in Australia and the UK," she says. "And what I'm really proud of is that I did it as a woman."

She points out that the path to being a specialist is long and slow. Everyone acknowledges that if you're going to pursue a specialty, sacrifices are necessary. But the sacrifices women make, she says, are more personal and more definitive. "By the time I got into my degree for specialty, I was going to graduate at the age of 36, knowing very well that I have possibly put a hold on any kind of child-bearing," she says. "That is a conscious decision I made at the time. Many women do this subconsciously without actually giving it much thought. And now that I'm in my 40s, I know how hard it is to have a child, and I wish I had found some solutions back then."

It's a candid confession from someone who has faced plenty of challenges over her life. But one of Dr Katyal's strengths as a business owner, an educator and a clinician is her willingness to face a challenge while acknowledging that the solution isn't always easy.

Knowledge seeker

Dr Katyal first came to Australia from India more than two decades ago, while she was halfway through her undergraduate dentistry degree. Her family decided to move to Australia to access better medical care for her mother, who had cancer. "I was quite happy living my life in India, and I think it was quite a cultural shock at the time," she says. "It was challenging for me for the first few years."

She threw herself into her studies at the University of Sydney, and as she completed her degree she realised orthodontics was her calling. "I knew from my final year in dentistry that I wanted to become an orthodontist. I loved anything about tooth movement. It's a bit nerdy, but it excited me."

Around the same time, she opened her first account with BOQ Specialist—a relationship that has lasted the entire length of her career. "From day one, when I graduated from the University of Sydney in 2001, they've been by my side," she says. "Literally everything I do is always with BOQ Specialist, from personal banking to commercial loans. No other bank has ever beaten them and the offers they've made me, and they are very easy to work with because they understand my work."

With her general degree under her belt, she found her eagerness to learn only increased. "I started on a path of becoming really good at what I do," she says. "I truly enjoyed the cosmetic side of things, and I did lots of courses, like many people do who are very curious and hungry for knowledge. After doing that over nine years of my practice, I thought about specialising."

But she found the traditional path challenging because of her gender. "If you look at all the specialists in Australia, only a third are women," she explains. "Then if you look at general dentists, almost 50 per cent are women. So why is it we drop off at specialty level? I think it's because of the personal sacrifices we have to make. Universities unfortunately don't cater for women at that certain time of their life when

BEST PRACTICE

According to BOQ Specialist's Jimmy Li, the relationship the bank has with Dr Katyal is a great illustration of how they can help at every stage of your life and of your career.

"Initially we helped Dr Katyal with her residential lending needs," he says. "We also did her investment residential property purchase to help her grow her personal investment property portfolio. Then when she went into practice in Mosman, on Sydney's Lower North Shore, BOQ Specialist was there to help with her equipment and fit-out needs too. Since then, we've assisted her with growing her commercial property investment portfolio. Plus we also take care of her credit card and transaction accounts – it's the whole suite."

As Dr Katyal's business (and life) changes and grows, Jimmy says it's very fulfilling to be part of something that is helping others in the profession. "And the profession appreciates it. There are a lot of young dentists who speak very highly of her, because they're grateful she's sharing her knowledge selflessly." ■

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they're ready to start a family. The specialist degrees are three years full time, and unless a woman has incredible financial and personal support, it's almost impossible to do this.”

Thinking ahead

In the meantime, Dr Katyal was aware of the demand among her colleagues to learn more about orthodontics. So, she started a pizza-and-study club at her house. That evolved into a more formal training arrangement—one that didn't always appeal to some of her specialist colleagues. “It was very obvious,” she says. “If I went to any conferences, some of the same colleagues who used to be my friends just walked away from me.

“If you go to a university and teach dentists to become specialist orthodontists, then the broader specialist profession says, ‘That's okay. We don't mind that because we can stop the wrong people from coming in.’ Whereas if you just do it on your own, some people suddenly get very suspicious and dismissive.”

She persisted and grew her BOSS Orthodontic College (the name is an acronym of Best Orthodontic Seminars and Sessions) through the difficult process of becoming an accredited education provider. After a few years the lure of educating herself returned, along with an awareness that she needed to know more about leadership. She enrolled in an MBA, which she completed in 2019, then took herself to Stanford University's famous Design Thinking boot camp.

“They're the world leaders in innovation,” she explains. “I met with hundreds of top entrepreneurs at the Stanford course. That sparked me to go further and develop a portal where doctors from around the world can facilitate education on a global scale beyond dentistry and orthodontics. So that's my next baby and next project I'm working on—it's called Doctors on Cloud.”

Guiding light

With that ever-expanding vision of what she can achieve, it would be easy for Dr Katyal to drift away from that original, core calling she shares with so many of her colleagues.

So while it is unlikely she'll return to clinical practice, Dr Katyal is shifting her chairside orthodontic role to a virtual orthodontist as a consultant and mentor.

“I believe in destiny and faith,” she says. “I see myself as somebody who will always keep moving on. I cannot go back. Instead I see myself mentoring and helping as many people as I can to have the skill in their businesses and practices to deliver fantastic results for their patients.

“Now I think I've even moved beyond that. I think teaching brought me work-life balance, and it's given me progression. I can take my teaching to the next level - the global scale. I don't see myself as being an orthodontist in the future. However, I see myself as helping many dentists across the globe deliver efficient results.”

She does take enormous pride in her achievements in her specialty. “I'm really proud to say I'm moving from chairside work when I'm at my peak,” she adds. “I've achieved some fantastic milestones. I've treated thousands of patients. I've learned that my next calling is to share what I've learned. And that takes a lot of my time. Then maybe in five years, the next stage of my life would be to help more doctors become educators, to use digital innovation and give them guidance, because I found a way to convert a clinical diploma into an online diploma.

“I've received some wonderful messages from colleagues to say what an inspiration I've been to them. That just means the world to me. What keeps me going, throughout all of this, is how thankful my students have been, and how thankful my patients have been.

“All of this has kept me going. Otherwise, I probably would've given up a long time ago. There were many, many roadblocks, but what would make me the happiest is if I were to see an equal balance of women and men in specialty degrees. I would like to see an equal balance of men and women in speaking roles at conferences. I think then we are getting closer to equality. We're getting closer to more women in leadership, which brings a different direction altogether in the industry.” ■

