

Renaissance man



Dentistry Award winner Nilesh Parmar explains to Guy Hiscott why spare time is overrated. . .

Nilesh Parmar has clearly never heard of the saying 'jack of all trades, master of none'. If he has, he's done a good job of ignoring it. After all, the man who took the title of Best Young Dentist in the East last year has not one but two masters degrees to his name already.

And despite a vested interest in implants (not to mention a qualification in prosthetic dentistry), he refuses to pigeonhole his dentistry either. He takes pride in offering 'a little bit of everything' to his patients – up to his comfort level at least.

The patients seem to like it too, if the glowing testimonials on his winning entry to last year's Dentistry Awards are anything to go by.

Keeping busy

Ever since qualifying from Queen Mary's in 2004, he's not stopped to rest on his laurels. A VT stint in Essex was swiftly followed by a post as senior house officer in restorative oral surgery at Guy's before returning to education, on the year-long prosthetics masters at the Eastman.

The ink on his certificate barely had time to dry before he'd signed up to follow 'the dream' – an implant masters, this time at Guy's.

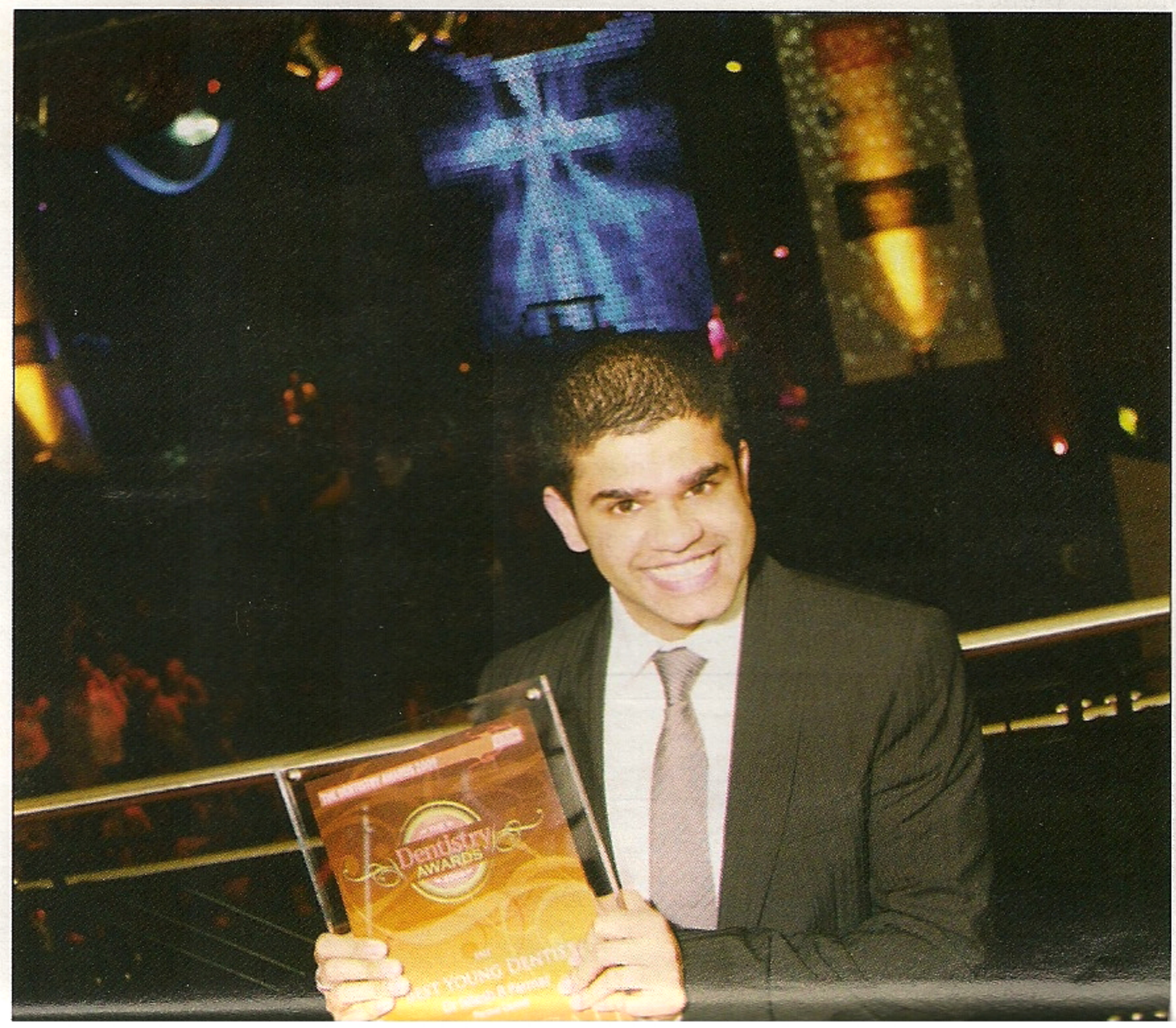
As if two back-to-back masters degrees weren't enough of a challenge, there was work to consider too.

His year at the Eastman saw him in university from Monday to Friday before working as the emergency on-call dentist for Southend on the weekends – Saturdays, some Sundays, and bank holidays. Although things eased up a bit once he started the part-time, two-year masters at Guy's, life was still hectic.

'It was challenging to last the three years,' he says. 'I didn't have that much of a life – I used to see my friends and go out, but I'd be getting up early the next day to work. Now, I can go out and have a lie in without feeling guilty for not studying! So it's nice to be done with all that – and it's good to start actually doing some dentistry.'

Despite everything, Nilesh is disarmingly modest – although his calm exterior belies an inability to take his foot off the gas. 'This award might say Best Young Dentist, but it's not Best Dentist,' he stresses. 'There's still a long way for me to go.'

He's on the right path, practising his dentistry in no less than three separate places



“My dad always told me not to worry about the cost – to do the work properly and the money would look after itself. And he's right”

– the family business Parmar Dental, successful private practice Sparkly Smiles in Blackheath, and another private practice in London Bridge.

He freely admits that this variety helps keep him interested. 'As much as I love this room, and it's been made to my personal specifications,' he says of his surgery at Parmar Dental, 'it's nice to go and do something different.'

The three practices certainly offer that, spanning a cross-section of patients who range from families to millionaire professionals. Being able to do the majority of work for his patients is clearly important to him.

He says: 'I always did general dentistry throughout it all, so even though my "expert" fields are supposed to be dentures and implants, I still do root canals, extractions; a little bit of everything. Of course, if I can't do it, then I do send it to someone else!

'I find a lot of my patients like the fact that all their work is being done by one individual. Once they have that faith in you, they're more than happy for you to do it.'

It's an approach that's led him to provide his high-end dentistry to some seriously influential people – TV presenters, high-flying CEOs and professional footballers to name but a few.

It may be professionally satisfying but dentistry at this level brings its own challenges. As Nilesh says: 'I do still get nervous treating certain people

– it's one thing doing an amalgam for a 60-year-old woman who adores you, but another thing when you're whitening the teeth of somebody whose father is on the Sunday Times Rich List!'

Home is where the heart is

The one constant since the very beginning has been the family business. And having just become a partner – a far cry from his first job there, cleaning out the shed – it's going to be part of Nilesh's life for a long time to come.

Even his part-time hours (Monday to Wednesday) in the practice were always part of the plan; Nilesh freely admits that he likes London life too much to give it up entirely.

He cites his father as one of his chief inspirations, and it's quite clear how much respect he has for him.

'I learn a lot from my dad; he's been doing it for 25 years and he's been there and seen it all. He always told me not to worry about the cost – to do the work properly and the money would look after itself. And he's right.'

A staunch advocacy of doing things to the best of his ability has taken him all over the world in pursuit of constant improvement.

He explains: 'Just because I've got a masters in something doesn't mean that I know everything about it – but it does mean that I've got a good grounding.'

He's visited Brazil for a bone grafting course, San Francisco

for CT training – going wherever the good dentists are to 'suck as much information out of them as possible'.

But he would like to see the UK taking more strides towards the cutting edge of dentistry.

'The really awesome dentistry is happening in the States and Europe; there are some really good guys here, but the amazing, cutting-edge stuff isn't happening in the UK so much... yet, anyway!'

'I'm quite happy to try new things and try and push stuff forward as long as the patient is happy with it. A lot of people discount treatments because there's not been a 20-year randomised clinical controlled trial on it, but somebody has to step up and actually start the groundwork.'

Charity begins at home

He admits he would feel 'deflated and depressed' if he just practised basic dentistry, but that doesn't detract from his commitment to the NHS. If anything, it adds to it; he's been known to go beyond the call of duty and perform full mouth reconstructions for younger patients with severe treatment needs under the NHS.

His father calls them his 'charity cases'. Nilesh calls it giving something back.

He says: 'Nobody else is going to do it, and for me it's always experience – and they're always grateful.'

'Nine times out of ten, they're going to be your patient for life. It's nice to make a difference. I'm not worried about the money. I think about the work, making sure that the patient's happy, and the money comes on its own.'

Charity might begin at home, but it doesn't end there. Nilesh has crossed the globe in the name of altruism, even doing aid work in India's forests of Jaipur.

In fact, extra curricular activities – for charity or otherwise – are something of a recurring theme with Nilesh. His educational commitments clearly not providing enough of a challenge, he set himself the goal of doing something extra every year.

'It started off with my

climbing Mount Kilimanjaro for DentaId,' he says. 'Then I did the marathon. Then I did my pilot's licence. Then I wanted to get rated on a bigger plane, so that took a bit longer. I did some abseiling, did the Nike 10k... that was quite painful actually!'

At the moment, he's chasing his helicopter pilot's licence, which he reassuringly describes as 'really difficult'.

He is infuriatingly modest when asked how he managed to fit all this in: 'Just good time management, really. I'm quite lucky in that I don't need to sleep very much, but I'm disciplined as well.'

'When people say that they don't have the time to do things. I'm always thinking "you have loads of time". You just have to be on it, so that when you get a spare minute, you use it.'

The future

Picking up the Best Young Dentist award last year was deserved recognition for every-

thing he's done up until now.

'It sounds like a cliché,' he says. 'But it was one of the defining moments in my life. The last three or four years have been really hard, and I've had ups as well as serious downs, but the award helped me draw a line under everything and move on – and do some dentistry!'

For all that he talks about how nice it is to be able to relax, he can't help himself – he has already started wondering about what to do next. So what happens now for the person who's achieved more in his twenties than some people do in a lifetime?

'If you put that question to my mum, it would probably be to get married and stop studying,' he laughs.

There's plenty of ambition left on the professional front yet though, not least of which is aiming for a spot on the restorative specialists register.

But first? It's simple – and understandable: 'More holidays, I think. Loads more holidays!'

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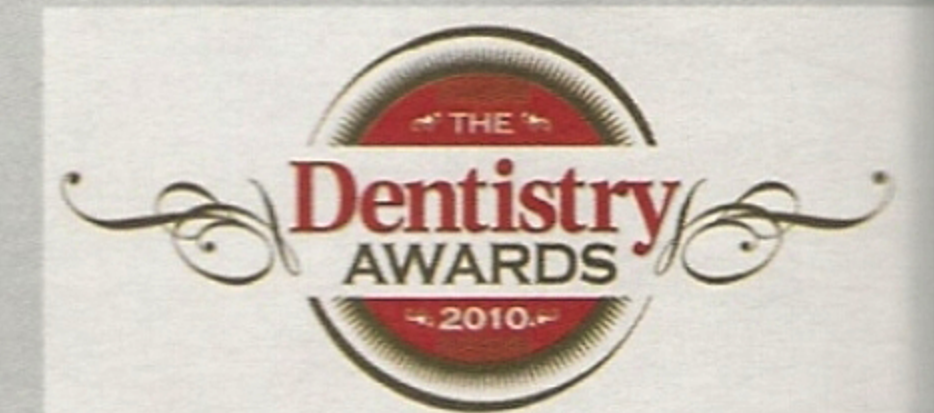
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