

# Smile-on News

Professional, Inspiring, Current

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## Keep running

9 May 2014

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On Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> April I ran the London marathon. Covering the miles, it occurred to me that a marathon is about more than just running– it's about practise, training, perseverance, and pacing yourself to avoid burning out. In fact, it's a bit like dentistry.

Recently, I feel that there are an increasing number of young dentists who have stopped seeing dentistry as a profession. They see it as a short term fix with a quick sprint for cosmetic treatment rather than a slow life long career full of learning, growth and development. Dentistry is a long-distance profession, and while it may be painful, with little gratification along the way, when you get to the finish line, it is certainly worth it.

Today, graduates sprinting for the 'smile' clinics and cosmetic centres are really going into the beauty industry rather than traditional dentistry, but without a general practice foundation and experience they can miss out. By contrast, because I was not allowed to undertake my Masters course until I'd completed five years in general practice, I saw a bit of everything and learnt more about dentistry and people in those five years than in any other training I've ever had.

In the past, there was pride in the profession, a sense of duty and a desire to serve your patients. What I see now is graduates sprinting for the spas and cosmetic centres, who are more interested in facial fillers rather than dental fillings. This rush not only to get rich quick, but to exit the NHS as quickly as possible, is a bit like entering a race without being properly prepared.

Like a marathon, dentistry is very much a personal journey and doesn't need to be competitive. It's about being proud of what you've done and do, competing with yourself to advance your knowledge. It's also important to preserve a sense of balance and the realisation that this great profession is for the long term – not just for the time it takes to get out in front – can help to achieve this.

I feel the profession is up against many obstacles, one of which is that we no longer feel trusted, feeling the need to 'look over our shoulder' all the time, being dragged down to the 'lowest common denominator' by the mounting rules and regulations. I'm sure 99 per cent of the profession want to do what's best for the patient, but because of cuts to NHS funding, monies are limited and in the NHS life-saving procedures are likely to take priority over dentistry. Nevertheless, teeth for the rich and dentures for the poor is not a choice that should have to be made.

Despite all this, dentistry is a great career. It is a privilege to help people, relieve pain, and make them feel good about themselves. It is also the result of a lifetime of learning, not only about teeth but about people. As professionals we can build real relationships – it may be a marathon, but it’s one worth running.

For further information please call EndoCare on 020 7224 0999 or visit [www.endocare.co.uk](http://www.endocare.co.uk)

### About the author

Michael Sultan has been the clinical director of EndoCae, a group of specialist practices, since 2008.

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