The multitasker

Tamara Berg manages a practice and raises a family, and still has time for the ODA

By Matt Connor
Managing Editor

It’s an unfortunate truism that many women feel that, at some point in their lives, they have to make a decision between having a career and having a family. For the female dentist, that choice may be complicated by the challenges of maintaining a practice and the additional time and energy put into professional associations.

Thirty-nine-year-old Tamara S. Berg, DDS, of Yukon, Oklahoma, faces all of those issues with great aplomb as vice president of the Oklahoma Dental Association (ODA), a position she attained during the group’s educational and policy-making annual session in Oklahoma City recently.

An Oklahoma native who received her doctorate in dental surgery in 1995 from the University of Oklahoma College of Dentistry, Berg has a four-operatory practice specializing in cosmetic and pediatric dentistry.

Clinical Innovations Conference informs dentists

By Marita Kritzinger, United Kingdom

Dental Tribune International and Smile-On have announced the successful closure of this year’s second DTI World Congress that was held last month at Regents College in London. It was the second congress the media group has co-organised after the 2007 congress in Venice, Italy, and the one that brought some of the world’s leading aesthetic and restorative authorities to participants.

“There have been many times when we’ve sung to the children during the process of trying to get them to open up,” Berg says of dealing with the difficulties of raising children while trying to balance a demanding practice.

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ing with youngsters in her practice. “I use tricks that I do as a mom. If I’m working with a little girl, I might ask them about their favorite princess or show them how I’m going to shine the ‘fairy light’ on their tooth and make them look like a princess. We try to relate it to something a child would be familiar with.”

Married for ten years to husband Lowell, who works for the biotech company Biogenesis, Berg has two sons, Karsten, 8 and Clayton, 3. “I have two boys, so I know a lot about superheroes and trucks,” she says, with a laugh. “You just try to find a common denominator with the child who is your patient and talk about it in their terms. Sometimes they think to themselves, ‘If she knows about Princess Aurora, then I’m okay.’”

She was barely into her teens herself when she decided to go into dentistry, and unlike many kids who change their minds about their future professions like the turn of a windmill, Berg stuck with her original plan through college and med school.

“Originally it was me going through orthodontics as a 15-year-old that got me interested in dentistry,” she said. “I was focused on dentistry from high school on. It wasn’t until I got to college and everyone else was going into medicine that I even questioned whether I wanted to or not. I definitely knew that dentistry was for me early on.”

Indeed, Berg is something of a walking advertisement for how a great smile can turn your life around. Shy and introverted prior to getting braces, her personality blossomed when she found herself with a beautiful new smile, sans braces.

“I was a pretty shy little girl,” she said. “Once I went through my orthodontic experience I just loved my smile and did a 180. I became involved in student government in high school and in college, and orthodontics just sort of opened up my personality.”

Her leadership experiences in college, in turn, prepared her for her future in the Oklahoma Dental Association.

“I started out in the Oklahoma Association of Women Dentists, and in school I became very active in that,” she said. “Then someone invited me to an Oklahoma county dental association meeting, and that was my first exposure to the ODA on the component level. Immediately I said to myself, ‘I can do that.’”

She soon threw herself into the organization’s various initiatives. “It just kind of happened,” she said. “I’m just one of those people where people look at me and say, ‘Okay, she’s going to do it. She’s going to get the job done.’ For me, I know that having small children I’d rather do it now than wait till my kids are older and have to give up basketball games or miss their high school years. Right now it’s easier to find someone to babysit!”

Berg says she’s “really passionate” about taking on positions of leadership, despite her busy professional and home life.

“I just make the time for it,” she said. “My husband and I really balance our schedules where we have a calendar where we know in advance that I’m going to have a board meeting in the evenings. That way we know that either Lowell can be there to watch the boys or if he’s at a meeting himself, we have to line up a sitter in advance.”

She also keeps Karsten and Clayton apprised of her life outside the home and her career. They know, she said, when she has a dental association meeting, and they occasionally meet her friends in the industry.

“I take them to things that are family-dental oriented,” she said. “I try to make sure we go to those kinds of things so they can see the people that I’m spending my time with when mom has to go to one of her dentist meetings.”

A particular interest for Berg is “bridging the different dental groups” in Oklahoma.

“Whether it’s the female dental group or people who want to be involved in the different service projects, I’m working on trying to unify them and bring them together,” she said. “I hear so many times, ‘I can’t be involved in that because I’m already too busy with other things.’ But, really, there’s definitely overlap where we can help each other out.”