Dentists are by far the easiest healthcare professionals to train in the area of facial aesthetics, but as with all medical procedures, further training and education in the field is a must, insists Dr Bob Khanna.

One of the fundamental concepts in dental undergraduate training is being able to understand the anatomy of the face, head and neck – a skill that is directly transferable to the facial aesthetics industry. Understanding the muscles of facial expression and the distribution of nerves and blood vessels, and being able to relate this to treatments is key to being able to correctly deliver treatment, and carry out procedures in a reproducible, effective and painless manner.

Improving skills
As with all new skills, confidence in this field is only acquired with practice. These are not skills that can be learnt from a textbook, and hands-on experience is the best way to learn. My training ethos is “tell-show-do”, and in the courses that I run, I encourage students to first learn the basics of a procedure, before watching me carry out a series of live procedures they can interact with, and ask questions about. I then encourage them to get as hands-on as possible as soon as they feel ready.

There is no substitution to hands-on training, but it is vital it is supervised by an experienced professional. I am keen to offer “beginner” and “advanced” modules as I believe this is the best route to take, as the learning experience cannot be rushed, no matter how skilled a practitioner you are. It would be foolhardy to expect to be able to inject delicate and complicated areas of the face after just one day’s training – after all, not many dentists would have been able to perform a complicated root canal procedure after just one day at dental school!

Making progress
Advances in medical science are helping to keep moving the facial aesthetic industry forward, with new products, techniques and methods becoming available all the time, therefore, once qualified it is important not to become complacent. It is vital to maintain an active interest in the industry, and ensure that all practitioners attend regular refresher courses. It is crucial to keep on top of the ever-changing trends within this fast-paced industry, as well as being confident with new, updated techniques.

As well as ensuring that medical employees are kept updated, it is essential to also make sure that all practice staff are well versed in the aesthetic procedures and fully understand the options available. Many potential patients are first likely to have an initial consultation with the reception team before speaking with the practitioner, and some patients prefer to air any concerns they have with them. If the whole team are able to answer questions confidently, and allay fears, the patient is likely to feel more comfortable and relaxed about the procedure, and indeed the whole experience.

As with every medical procedure, it is unlikely that every case will be the same. Learning how to deal with any complications that arise, or difficult cases, is key to gaining confidence – however, this is a skill that is ultimately learnt through experience. I offer a mentoring system for my students, so if they ever experience any doubt, or feel that they would benefit from a little extra advice when planning a treatment, I am on hand to answer any questions.

Confidence and competence
The most important thing to consider before getting started in the facial aesthetics industry, however, is the enthusiasm required to be able to offer the best treatment. Although all treatments are entered into voluntarily, remember that the patient is putting their face in the hands of the practitioner, and therefore requires that person to be completely confident and competent, in order to ensure that they walk out of the surgery with a smile.

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About the author
Dr Bob Khanna is widely regarded as one of the world’s leading exemplars of dentistry and facial aesthetics. President and founder of non-profit organisation The International Academy for Advanced Dental Aesthetics (IAADA), Dr Khanna heads the only UK organisation in cosmetic medical and dental professionals. He is the appointed clinical tutor in facial aesthetics at the Royal College of Surgeons and has trained thousands of dentists and doctors through the Dr Bob Khanna Training Institute.