‘Timing in life is everything’

Dr. Barry Matza talks about the events that led him to orthodontics and interdisciplinary dentistry

By Dennis J. Tartakow, DMD, MEd, PhD
Editor in Chief

Please introduce yourself to our readers and tell us about your background in orthodontics.

I graduated from Tufts University, School of Dental Medicine in 1975 and worked as a general dentist for a maxillofacial prosthodontist. While teaching at Tufts the following year in the Oral Diagnosis Department, I met Dr. Everett Shapiro, chair of postgraduate orthodontics, and two years later received a certificate in orthodontics.

What is the name of the institution with which you are affiliated?

Nova Southeastern University, School of Dental Medicine, Department of Postgraduate Orthodontics, where I am an adjunct assistant professor.

What motivated you to become an orthodontist?

When I was in dental school, my first interest was in oral pathology as a result of being fortunate to have an exceptional teacher, Dr. Gerald Sklar.

However, I wanted more patient contact, and my next thought was specializing in oral and maxillofacial surgery. I spent a week of my spring vacation at Boston City Hospital and decided that this was not for me either.

I then pursued a career in orthodontics and enjoyed the challenge immensely: the age of the typical orthodontic patient, the thought process requiring biomechanics as an integral part of treatment and the challenge of “full mouth reconstruction in enamel on every patient.”

Oclusion has always interested me. In my opinion, the complexity and variability of the stomatognathic system is a lifelong pursuit of the knowledge, and applying its principles to treat a patient's malocclusion really appealed to me.

When and how did you open your orthodontic practice?

After working a couple of years in New England, I moved to South Florida and opened my office in Boca Raton in 1979. I specifically remember the patient who paid for treatment up front as it was the first month I was able to pay the rent without drawing on my loan. This took five years, and as the saying goes: Patience is a virtue!

What special areas of education, research or clinical activities are you most interested in and why?

Although the interest in children motivated me to pursue orthodontics, timing in life is everything. When I first opened my office, the referral patterns did not allow me to build the adolescent patient referral. I was getting adult patients more and more. This forced me into an arena I knew little about as I had not treated many adults during my training.

I was later introduced to the Seattle Study Club Network where my interest in interdisciplinary dentistry began. After practicing orthodontics for 10 years, I began to interact with restorative dentists and the other dental specialists in a different manner. The adult dentition that was worn, mutilated and in need of a team approach became my focus.

It was 15 years after graduating dental school, and now I had the need to re-educate myself. I began taking courses that had little to do with orthodontics. If I was to communicate with my dental colleagues, I needed to learn and communicate in their language as well as understand current concepts of reconstruction.

Prior to teaching at NSU, I became involved with the craniofacial team at the University of Miami School of Medicine, where I was a clinical instructor in the Department of Plastic Surgery.

I had the privilege to be on the craniofacial team with Dr. Ralph Millard. I spent 10-plus years on that team and had the opportunity to learn the orthodontic needs of the craniofacial patient.

Not only did I get back to treating the adolescent, but I was taking impressions on infants to fabricate appliances in order to move alveolar segments in patients with cleft lip and palate deformities prior to the initial surgery to close the cleft.

As an educator, what are your most important educational responsibilities to your postgraduate orthodontic residents?

My role as educator has changed over the past 10 years at NSU; I review the literature with the orthodontic residents in adult treatment, periodontics, smile esthetics, interdisciplinary treatment, aligner therapy and craniofacial anomalies.

In your opinion, is there a need to change the way higher educational programs in this country educate their orthodontic residents?

We need more educators. However, in order to attract them, the pay scale needs to be attractive, especially today with the debt incurred by a new dentist as soon as he or she graduates.

As an educator and clinician, what orthodontic techniques do you teach?

I teach with a bidimensional edgewise technique. However, it is not the appliance that makes a case excellent; it is the diagnosis and implementation of a treatment plan using sound biomechanical principles, as well as understanding how the face grows and how that differs from the non-growing patient, that is omnipotent.

Regarding the American Board of Orthodontics Certification, in your opinion

• Will more certified orthodontists benefit the specialty, the patient or both?
• What are some positive and/or negative effects of these changes?
• Is American Board Certification as important today as it was in the past?

For me, becoming board certified was a very positive learning experience. The process of reflection on treated cases was enlightening and made me become a better orthodontist.

Looking back at your career, would you do anything differently?

I have been extremely fortunate. “I’ve done it my way!”

Do you have any final comments for our readers?

Orthodontics is a great profession. We can make a difference in our patients’ lives. What a pleasure it is to go home at the end of the day when a patient thanks you for your help and you can say to yourself, “A job well done.”

Dr. Barry Matza is an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Postgraduate Orthodontics, Nova Southeastern University, College of Dental Medicine. His professional accomplishments and academic appointments include: diplomate, American Board of Orthodontics; clinical instructor, Department of Diagnosis, Tufts School of Dental Medicine; consultant, South Florida Cleft Palate Clinic, University of Miami, School of Medicine, Division of Plastic Surgery; clinical attending instructor, University of Miami, School of Medicine, Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and Department of Plastic Surgery; and visiting lecturer, Post-Graduate Department of Orthodontics, Tufts University, School of Dental Medicine. Dr. Matza is a graduate of Tufts School of Dental Medicine and its postgraduate orthodontic residency program (DMD and Certificate). He has a private practice in Boca Raton, Fla.