The 20-Year Shortcut - How Dr. Paola Suglio Acquired a 20-Year Practice Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Background

Welcome to another show of Healthcare Business Growth Conversations. For many patients, dentistry is still out of fear, past experiences, and a sense of loss of control.

For practice owners, that fear creates a constant challenge. How do you deliver exceptional care without patients feeling overwhelmed the moment they walk in?

Our guest today has approached that challenge from a deeply personal place. She grew up in a family of dentists in Venezuela, trained as a prosthodontist and later rebuilt her career through the U. S.

board and re-education process before becoming a first-time practice owner in Naples, Florida. She's the owner of Palm and Pearl Tent, and her work is centered on making patient comfort a clinical priority, not a marketing promise.

Dr. Sublio, welcome to the show. Thank you for having me today. I appreciate the time and giving me the opportunity to share my experience as a foreign trained dentist and as business owner here in the United States.

Thank You. Yeah, it's my pleasure. Thank you for your time too. So I just want to start with your background. You come from a family of dentists and have seen the profession from the inside your whole life.

Growing up around it, where do you think the deep seated, freer patients have toward dentistry really comes from? Oh, well, my background, as you perfectly said, I grew up and was born and raised in Venezuela and I grow up in a family of dentists.

My parents both are dentist, My dad being an orthodontist and my mom a pediatric dentist.

Origins of Dental Fear and Patient Comfort

So I Grew up In a dentistry environment, right? So that kind of gave me the passion for dent history, what they did with so much passion, dedication, and commitment to their career, their patients.

And that was basically transmitted to me and to my brother. We spontaneously decided to follow their steps one way or the other. Perfect. So, you were generally towards addressing the fear of the patients and also you moved to the US.

How did that transition work out for you? Well, the fear is something that it's basically created from past experiences in general, not only in dentistry.

So my mom being a pediatric dentist, she in a way taught me subconsciously and seeing her practicing how to manage kids. When you're a kid and going to visit the dentist is not a traumatic experience because definitely traumatic experiences are going to set the fear for future experiences applying of course this in this case to dental fear and stress to be in a devil's chair.

So basically the main goal, my main go as a dentist is for my patients to have a pleasant visit to the dentist even though that kind of sound We're being in a pleasant visit to the dentist, but that's our goal here at Pullman Pearl Dental.

We make our patients feel comfortable by giving them the time they need listening. actively listening to their needs,

to the fears, their desires and of course never rushing a patient.

I give all my attentions to my patients. Never want them to feel rushed because I am not in a hurry. Dedicated my time for my patient to serve them and to make them feel comfortable and provide the treatment or the relief that they need.

So on the same line, you're already a trained prosthodontist before coming to the US. And again, we have to go through the process in the U. S. again. So how did that experience help you?

Maybe helped you see the things from a different perspective today? Definitely, because growing in a family of dentists, basically everything was given to me and my brother.

We had a practice that came from basically my parents. So coming to the United States after being a specialist and starting from scratch, I started being the dental assistant.

Rebuilding a Career in the U.S.

And then, of course, The only thing that I really like and my passion was for dentistry and I worked as a customer service and an implant manufacturer for a couple of years while I was getting ready and getting prepared to the boards and apply to go back to school because that's the only way that basically we can practice here in America being a foreign trade dentist.

So that's exactly what I did. I just focused my attention on what my goals were. Um, I, just did what i needed to do. There was no ego or anything. It was just humble because that is my passion and that was and is and will be always my fashion.

That's what I know, that's why I love to do and that is what i do every day and I enjoy it. It's not a burden for me to serve my patients. I come here to this place every morning very happy to take care of the people that are here.

Not only myself, it's also the people that surround me, which makes, of course, the whole experience successful for the patients. And going back to your initial question, you have to just put back all the, oh, I was a prostamontist or I, but that is not what mainly identify me as a person.

So what it identifies me is what I love to do. what I like to serve people. I'd like and take care of the patients that are in need, that in pain and that is where my satisfaction is coming from mainly.

That's an incredible story of resilience and figuring the things out in a different country and then Finally, you stepped into a practice that had been run by some other dentist for over 20 years.

What was the hardest part inheriting that legacy as a first-time owner? It's been challenging, but it's challenging in a good way. Since I came to the United States, everything has been a challenge, a goal, and I always wanted to have my own place.

I have my own practice. It took me years to finally come in Pearl Dental. it took around six years with the dream and not knowing how would that happen or how that was going to show up.

How would I determine, okay, is this the right space? Is this right practice? This is the time? There's always doubt, but I always had the confidence that It was going to happen when it was exactly like that.

It's an interesting story because I was so focused on wanting to have my own place that one day I spoke with all of these dental brokers and all that and he said, oh, no, Paula, it's very hard to find a place in Naples.

It's it's basically impossible. I don't have anything for you. And that happened probably over a year ago. In one morning, I was searching. It was on a Sunday and I Was searching and outside.

Okay, there is a practice in St. Pete, which is, of course, far away from Naples. and i reach out to the broker and said, i told my husband, listen, let's get out in Nape.

Taking Over a Legacy Practice

We need I we need to do something and he's like, I was like, a little bit. And then he said, Okay, well, we'll go whatever we need to go. So I reach out to the broker and he's like well I see that you're requesting information on a practice that is not in your area.

Is that correct? I'll say yes, because Of course, I said there's nothing available and he's like, well, i just have a practice that I haven't even listed yet And it's a great practice.

It's in the heart of naples. Are you interested? And I was like absolutely So that was a sunday on a tuesday, uh afternoon my husband and I came here to look at the office it was beautiful office newly remodeled in being here for over 20 years.

So, and that's when this whole process started. And going back to your initial, of course, question, what are the most challenging part that I have faced on transitioning to a practice that the doctor was here over 25 years?

It's been challenging, especially with part of the staff, because, of course, working with the same person for so many years, you get used to how they do things.

And in a way, as a human being, are in the comfort zone. When you're taking out of your comfort zones, some people just don't handle it, or let's say they handle differently.

I have a vision for what I want to provide as a service for the patients. And we had some turnover because there was staff members that were not aligned or, you know, here I am, a younger doctor, female, the doctor that left was a male doctor.

It was just a matter of time. They made their own decisions finding out that this was not the right place for them. And of course, after that, introducing myself to patients and letting them know who I am, where I come from.

And it's just being honest. It's a matter of time where trust can show up from patients, but they have been really receptive. I have no complaints and I'm very blessed and happy to be here.

Well, that's a good transition. And I believe you choose a branding, right? Like you change the name of the dentistry to Pom & Pearl. Yes, it was an interesting name that honestly it, was not my initial idea.

It was my husband's idea and I went one morning, he's like, I like this name. What do you think? And I absolutely love it because of course we are in the beautiful Naples, Florida, full of palm trees and the beach and all that.

It's so palm supplied directly to that and then of course the pearls because our teeth are basically like pearls They're beautiful the white and they that's part of the frame and it's a reflection or of Your inner person so I thought that you know what common pearl dental really is what I like and that is where it came from good story for the brain, aligning your vision and then your line of work with the locality where you are there.

So yeah, going back to the team, now it's been quite some time right now, and then most of the teams aligned.

Naming Palm and Pearl Dental

So the next challenge is the patient base. Even when the staff trusts you, the patients are still looking for the familiar face they have known for years, if not decades.

How is that transition going on for you? Well, the way that I look at it, of course, in that left or the former dentist that was here and there's me coming from part of my staff as well.

So I just want the patients to come in and I want to listen to their needs. Right. I never want. or feel like I need to push any patients to do anything.

My only goal when they come for a visit, either for hygiene or not, is to inform on what they have. So I will inform the patients on I see on an exam, on X-rays, and in my conversation, of course.

And after that, they are in charge. I tell them this is from now, my goal is to inform you as a patient. After that, you're in charge.

Building Trust With New Patients

You are driving the boat. you tell me when you want to do something, if you wanna do it and how you wanted to it. Typically, I give my patients three options and they will decide what they, three or four sometimes and able to decide one, is the best decision for them.

They know what's going on, they know the pros and cons, and that's my goal. If you know, what is going, you are in charge next. You will let me know how you want to take care of your dental needs, if you are ready for that or not.

Maybe you're not ready. For that right now, maybe you will in a few months or in the week or a year. I completely respect the patient's desires because I don't want any patients to feel uncomfortable, to fill pressure, any of that.

Yeah, that's a good way of taking care of the patients through trust, giving them the options. On the same line, of giving the care, the right care to the patient, you went one step beyond that.

And then, I want to put that as the one thing that stood out for me when I looked at Adler Profile and then at your website, which is stress-free dentistry.

That was the first link that I clicked. I was just thinking, you know, to read about your philosophy, but I completely stumped by reading about the laughing gas.

So, where did that come from? I've never heard of a dentist using laughing-gas as a part of stress-free experience for any patient. Yes, well, the laughing gases or nitrous oxide has been around for years, years and years.

And it's a great option for patients to feel relaxed. The laughing gas or nitrogen oxide is not going to sedate you. It's not a sedation. Is just something that is going help manage the anxiety that the patients have being in a dental chair.

Of course, there's options for IV sedation and also we combine the nitrous oxide with some oral sedations and that works really well for the patients.

They're able to manage the anxiety, the stress they have. And that, of course, together with the regular protocols for numbing the patients, it works phenomenal for the patient.

They really come back saying, this was a great experience. Having a tooth extracted or multiple teeth extracted and implants in the same visit, It works great.

It was phenomenal or the patience. So, on the same line, most people think anxiety starts when the procedure begins. In your experience, where does patient stress actually start?

Well, the stress actually starts from previous experiences, as we were saying earlier, right? So if you didn't have a good experience in a dental chair, it was painful.

The recovery was not good.

Stress-Free Dentistry and Laughing Gas

Or when you were while you are being treated, you weren't experiencing discomfort. And that was a dress in the moment that is going to create An experience is going to create a memory that is gonna bring back all those kind of feelings of fear and that's basically where the fear comes from.

From previous experiences and sometimes the anticipation of the unknown. When we don't know what's going happen, of course, that creates a lot of anxiety and fear.

So that why, well, the laughing gas and all of these things help. I like to talk a lot with my patients, I'd like listen to them, and I give my full attention to my patient when they are here, actively listening to what their needs are, because the needs for one patient are most likely not the same for another patient.

So I am there with the staff around to actively listen know and address what is going to make your visit as stress-free as possible. You name it, you need blankets, headphones, laughing gas, one of my staff members to give you a hand.

Sometimes we have If patients wants to bring their significant others, we allow that to sometimes. So anything that we do to make you feel comfortable from the moment you walk in until the movement, you check out everything or dedicated for you.

Our full attention is for. And it's tailored. It's individual for, or not in any hurry. and again, We are for our patients. Does stress-free care require more time than the regular other dentistry care?

No, I mean the protocols that they do. Well, of course, if the patient decides that he will like to have the laughing gas or the nitrous oxide, definitely we need more times because we bring the patients in, we make them feel comfortable in the chair, then the a few minutes and then we start administering the gas and once the patient is feeling relaxed and we actually start the process of putting anesthetics and the processes of waiting for the anesthetic to be effective and do the procedure that we need to do.

We need more time when patients decide that they would like to either do Galapagos by itself or combine with any oral medications. Got it. So does this laughing gas or any other add ons, does it cost more for the patient?

There's a minimum fee for the laughing gas and it's flat fee. Regarding the oral medication, we don't provide that here in the office. We just send the prescriptions to the pharmacy because we're not allowed to provide here that in office, so prescriptions go to pharmacy, the patient's pharmacy.

The patient will pick up their prescription and then they can take it 30 minutes before their dental visit. When that's the case, the patients are not supposed to drive, so the patient will need a driver to drop them off and pick them up when they're done with their visit.

So does patients surprise whenever you offer them the laughing gas? Some patients are, and they really like it. Sometimes they're not used to, but after they experience it, they love it because they feel relaxed.

They feel at ease. And that's mainly what they want, have the best experience as possible, being in a place that is typically not where people want to be.

At what point in your career you thought about introducing the laughing gas and then the whole philosophy of stress-free? I grew up with that. My mom, she's a retired pediatric dentist.

So before I did my specialty in prosthodontics, I worked with her next to her. Being a pediatric dentists, they worked basically all the time with laughing gas, nitrous oxide.

They also do IV sedation and general anesthesia for long dental procedures. So my entire career was developed into that. Hopefully in the near future, we will be providing IV Sedation in The Office.

That's in in have something more than just the laughing gas and oral sedation. That's not yet available, but it will

be. Well, you're thinking about the next phase of a stress-free philosophy.

Managing Anxiety, Time, and Costs

Correct. Perfect. I think now creating that patient experience, making them to feel ease itself is very refreshing. And I thing that's a great, not only from the care point of view, also from branding point, it's great thing you are doing.

Correct. Yes. So just on the cost side, what usually breaks during the costs discussions? Are you referring when you say breaks is like how do we manage treatment plans?

Is that what you're referring to? Yeah, more of a patient comes in and then they have to pay for the stress free and also there are other costs that are involved.

How do you manage that whole process? Do you have any protocol for that or is it different for every patient? Well, treatment plans are tailored for every patient, right?

There's no recipe for treatment plants because treatment plan are individual for the person, so yes, of course, we have some systems that we use that have worked for me in the past and our intentions here is for patients to really understand what they need and understand the value of the treatment that we're offering when you understand.

The value. Of your well-being and then the financial aspect comes kind of secondary right so typically what we do. Patients come a lot for second opinions, third opinions.

And that visit is fully complimentary because it's just a conversation that we do with our patients. So we offer that complimentary. Sometimes if patients would like, we can do some diagnostics with a clinical exam or a CBCT, depending on what the case goes, is going to need.

And then after that, we establish, let's say, three treatment plans. Let's, say a patient, it's an implant or two implants, right? So we give patients options, because the plan might be the ideal, but we have to give you also other options.

You can do an implant, you can a bridge, a partial removal, or you could do nothing. Why are the pros and cons of all of that? So if you understand and we're delivering a message that our patients is clear for our patient is that they can really understand the value and then when you go over the financial aspect, basically it's really accepted, the reception of what we're presenting is better because you understand what's the value, right?

Besides being a value amount, but the values is what is going to be overall, how it's going affect your overall health, your well-being, on your daily basis, to chew to laugh to smile to spend time with your friends being comfortable when you're eating when You're talking when?

You go out in a party. You don't want to be feeling uncomfortable because maybe you have a partial that traps food or maybe You have adventure that becomes loose and you cannot eat comfortably when your dinner So all those things when we understand values as human beings and then the rest comes second there So when we go to the financial aspect, of course, we are very clear with our patients.

There's no There's nothing secret. Everything is clear from the beginning. It's in a paper. If the patient needs more than one visit to address all their questions, we do.

We're always open for that. And then of course we have some financial options for the patients and we offer some discounts depending on the individual situation.

So, only five months into owning this practice, What do you understand now about building a successful dental practice that you didn't realize on day one of taking over?

Well, I'm still trying to realize everything because of course this is a new adventure a New journey to me. So it's I

would say you live and learn every day.

Lessons From Practice Ownership

It's a learning experience for me in every aspect from Of course patients but from managing aspect From having everything up to date and Licensing making sure all the requirements are up today.

I really have a great supporting team, which is my office manager that I would be together for some time and then my dental assistant and front desk. I mean, I really have good people around me and without them, this wouldn't be possible, right?

Because besides being a dentist, covering all those aspects is something that is definitely not doable. You have to have people that you can trust and which I do, the people that are around me, I trust them, and I know that they have the same vision that I have.

So it's a Friday where we don't see patients clinically, but most of my Fridays I am here in the practice checking that everything is running, making sure that all the cases are sent, you know all kinds of aspects of a business with my bookkeeper, with the accountant, making sure that we are engaging now with our social media, providing content for social, media for patients and of course there's along those lines is making operating correctly.

It's a learning curve. We never stop learning. And every day it's learning experience for me with patients, with staff, the business, and with life in general.

Perfect. You know, when I reached out to you, you told me that you took over this practice from someone. That was a moment when, I realized, last week I was talking with another neurologist.

from Tampa Bay area. Now he's been in the practice for over 30 years now and when I asked him, what is the one suggestion that you give to the young residents, this is exactly what he told.

it was like okay young residents just go into the speciality practices and then see if you can take over the legacy practices so that the care for the patients continue and also you don't need to figure out everything on your own right from the equipment to the not to the staff, and then most of it is if it comes to you.

And then I think I'm having this conversation with you today after 10 days of talking with him. So it's good to see that whole strategy in reality. If I ask you to give one solution to either the residents or someone who wants to take over the other practices, what is the solution that you're gonna give it to them?

that always pursue their dreams and their goals, be humble, right? Because if you're not humble it doesn't flow. Be humble. I love sharing my experience with younger generations and this feels so weird to me because I never thought that I was going to be saying that, but I am so I'm really open the doors are open of the office.

Be always open mind to learn. We are humans and we are going to make mistakes and you need to be humble enough to own your mistakes. And when something doesn't go the way that we want to go, we have to responsible.

So I want my patients to feel that from me. If something goes wrong, I am here. I will be responsible and I Leave my patients behind.

Advice for Young Dentists and Closing Thoughts

I will hold their hands until things are correct and done correctly so mainly that's what you know, I that will be my advice be humble enough to Know that things Are not gonna go all the time the way that we plan and we need to be ready for things that are not going to go how we want it and We need To be Ready we Need to Be Humble And we have to take the consequences face them and do whatever needs to be done to make it right.

Awesome. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you feel like you want to share? I don't think so. This is new to

me. I've never done this before.

But it's kind of fun. And I love sharing my experience with younger generations of dentists, with patients. Not only dentist, anybody that is in the in the healthcare field, being an immigrant and pursuing your dreams.

Being in a country that you have to learn everything from scratch, even a different language and speaking a language. And it all comes back to being humble enough to to face and pursue your dreams and your goals.

Awesome. Thank you, Dr. Sugleil, thank you very much for your time. And I believe we can meet maybe after six months to revisit your story of your new office and then how it is going.

Thank you. Thank appreciate it so much. And if anybody here on this area enables is listening to us, I will invite the population out there. They're looking for a dental home.

We are our doors are open to come and visit feed our team or our staff are great hygienist. I mean, we're here to help. Yeah, definitely. I will include all the links in the show notes.

And also for all of the little notes, I just want to end this with this note that Dr. Sibleo created a patient experience as a part of a foundation. It is not an offered thought.

So definitely you have to visit Dr Sableo in Naples, Florida, if you're in a rundown. Thank you Dr, Sbleo again. Thanks for your time today.