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**SLAINE KER**

Principal dentist at The Row in Edinburgh. Slaine won Best Young Dentist at the Dentistry Scotland Awards 2023

  
**THE ROW**  
DENTAL  
Dr. Slaine Ker

# Committed to growth

**Slaine Ker** shares the journey of The Row and reveals the challenges of building a specialist referral dental practice

**In February 2021, when my husband and I started searching for a property in Edinburgh to house our dream dental practice, our vision was on opening a beautiful cosmetic practice.**

At the time, we were living in London, where I had spent the last 10 years developing my passion and skill set for cosmetic dentistry.

Our vision turned into reality almost two years later when we opened the doors to our first patients. The Row Dental was born! The 20 months of hard work navigating building contractors, lease negotiations, council planning (and the rest) had finally paid off.

The result is a state-of-the-art dental clinic housed in a grade A listed Georgian townhouse in the centre of Edinburgh.

## A CHANGE OF PLAN

We wanted The Row to offer the latest cosmetic dentistry treatments – including Invisalign, tooth whitening, composite bonding and porcelain veneers. And while footfall has been far better than we could have hoped for, it became apparent early on that by offering only cosmetic procedures, we were doing a disservice to our patients, many of whom were looking for a one-stop-shop for dentistry.

So, we started expanding our team. Exactly one year on, we have a team spanning orthodontics, oral surgery, endodontics, dental implants and, of course, general dentistry. Our team is now almost complete.

Building a specialist referral practice wasn't in the plan all those months ago, and it comes with a new set of challenges.

## THE CHALLENGES

### Establishing a network of referring general dentists

Developing strong relationships with general dentists is crucial for a referral-based practice. Convincing them to refer their patients to our specialist services requires trust-building and effective communication.



### Marketing and branding

Creating awareness about our services among both dental professionals and potential patients is essential. For cosmetic dentistry, we are appealing to the masses (general public). For referrals, we are appealing to 100 to 200 general dental practitioners in Edinburgh and surrounding areas. Both activities require very different approaches.

### Patient education

Educating patients about the importance of seeking specialised dental care can be challenging. Patients may be unfamiliar with the need for specialised services and may require additional information to make informed decisions about their treatment plan. Ongoing training for the dental team is essential so we can deal with patient queries effectively.

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In focus

THE ROW





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## Coordination of care

Coordinating care between general dentists and specialists can be complex. Efficient communication systems, referral tracking, and clear protocols for collaboration are essential to ensure seamless patient care and building trust with general dentists.

## Recruitment of skilled specialists

Attracting and retaining skilled specialists is critical. I am a firm believer that The Row is only as good as the people working here. Specialists who are well-regarded in their field enhance the reputation of the practice.

However, recruiting such personnel takes time and patience, which can be disconcerting when you have patients waiting for specific treatments.

## Investment in specialised equipment and training

Specialised dental procedures require advanced equipment. The initial investment in technology to open our doors was substantial. We hadn't factored in buying a CJ-Optik Flexion Twin White microscope or a Dexis OP 3D CBCT scanner in year one.

Luckily, my husband is an accountant and looks after the finances, so he shoulders the burden of balancing the books.

## Patient experience

Ensuring a positive patient experience is obviously key. Many patients are visiting for the first time, so making them feel comfortable from the outset is important.

From the initial consultation to post-treatment care, maintaining high standards in patient care and satisfaction is essential for building a good reputation.

Every clinician is different, but as the team grows, creating consistency across our service offering requires increasing attention.

## A team approach

Successfully addressing these challenges requires careful planning, effective communication, and a commitment to providing high-quality, specialised care. Something all the team at The Row has thankfully bought into.

Building a strong reputation and establishing trust within the dental community and among patients takes time, but it is something we are all wholeheartedly committed to, as these elements are crucial for the growth of a specialist referral dental practice. DS

