

Straight outta' London...

We speak to Kash Qureshi, new owner and managing director of Bremadent Premier London about training, time management and business challenges

Q. Can you please tell us a little about how and when your lab was created, and how the business has grown since?

Bremadent Premier London is a full-service commercial dental laboratory based in London and was established in 1969 by John Gerrard. In October 2015 I acquired the lab from John and took over as managing director in conjunction with the opening of the Swissdent Denture Clinic.

The laboratory started as a small one-storey building adjacent to a dental practice. Over the years, BPL expanded to offer a full service and is now two-storeys high with an added extension adjacent to the building for our second office, in-house clinic and sterilisation room.

Q. Where did you train/qualify, and is there any further education you have undertaken since?

I was born and bred in Walthamstow, East London where the lab is. I had a decent education and upbringing and came from a family where you had to work hard to get what you wanted in life, but growing up in London was hard, you basically had to be tough to survive. If it wasn't for John and the laboratory, I could have easily ended up in prison.

As a 16 year old I answered an ad in the paper, it didn't say much, just 'Model maker

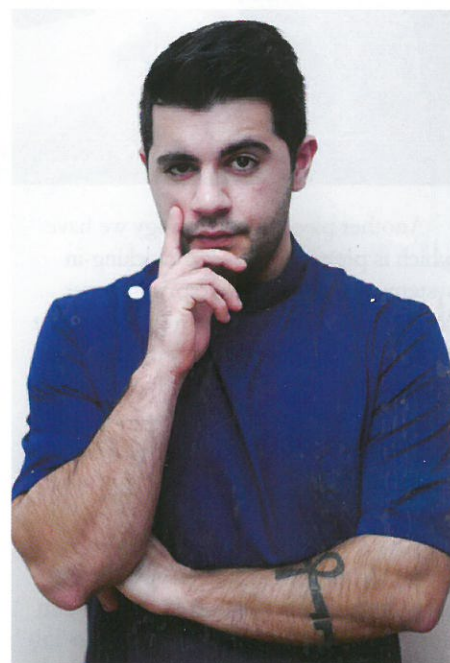
wanted'. I came in and saw John Gerrard - I remember him seeming really tall - he showed me a model, and the shape it needed to be, so I trimmed it and John said it was better than some of his technicians. So I got the job, started in the plaster room and soon I was training other apprenticeships coming in. Since then I worked in the prosthetics department, managing that and building it up, expanding it to seven technicians. Learning about prosthetics taught me a lot before I did the clinical stuff, I went on lots of courses and studied the Swissdent manual nonstop.

I qualified as a CDT from UCLAN in Preston, taking the course while working in the lab. It was still in its early stages but a very good course. It extended my knowledge of what I was doing wrong in prosthetics, seeing things from a dentist's perspective and helping me respect what they do. Now when I approach new dentist clients, as a CDT I can show that I understand what they do.

Q. What type of work does your laboratory carry out?

Being a full-service dental laboratory we offer crown and bridge, prosthetics, implants, vacuum-formed appliances and shade-taking facilities with dedicated managers for each department.

We also have the denture clinic, it's not



the main part of the business but it is very important. When you're treating patients they pay up front which helps with the cash flow. Within the business it's treated as another account although the work we do there is seen as premium.

Q. How many other people work with you at the lab?

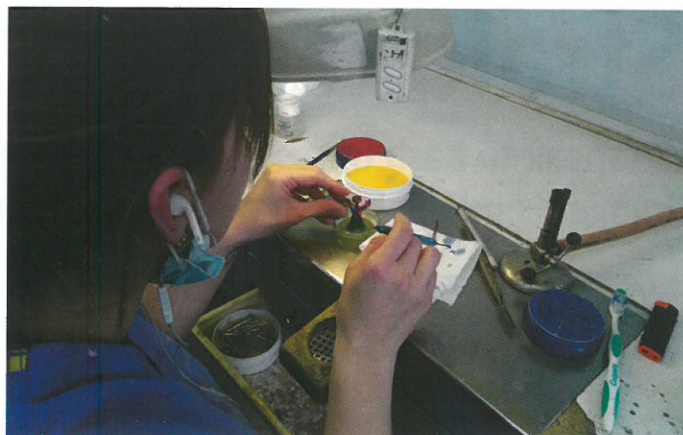
Currently we have a staff of 15, with a couple more people who work on a casual basis, as and when they're required.

Our departments are prosthetics, ceramics, CAD/CAM, metalwork (crown and bridge), the clinic and sterilisation room, large plaster room and office space.

Q. What kind of high-tech equipment/technology do you use at the lab?

We do have CAD/CAM machines - Zircon, NobelProcera and Sirona. When CAD/CAM first came in it was sold as being able to replace a technician - but of course you still needed a technician to run it. For Bremadent we see it as being able to make a technician much more productive - they can be multitasking and





Another piece of technology we have which is pretty smart is our clocking-in system. We can't use fingerprints as our hands are usually covered in plaster, so we have an eye scanner at each entrance, this allows me to see who's in and what time they arrive and leave. It also makes it much easier to calculate payroll for those on hourly rates which saves me a lot of time.

Q. How do you stay on top of the latest developments in products and techniques, and at what stage do you decide to integrate them into your lab?

I'm very particular about introducing new things, I think you really have to believe in a product for you to be able to sell it. Our Valplast machine is a good example, I was interested so went on course, we got the machine in and within two months we'd covered the cost of the machine through selling it to patients because I knew it worked and would benefit them.

Knowing your costs is another key point. You can easily work out how to price things by knowing how much every part of a process costs so no one loses out. You have to remember that the patient is the most important person. Some times that can boil down to being very simple, Swissdent is a product I've always believed in - I see denture cases where lots of work has gone into the soft tissues, they look beautiful with natural-looking veins and so on - but when the patients put the denture in their mouth they don't see that, but they will notice if it doesn't fit, or if there are bumps.

Q. What have been the major challenges in running the business?

Since I took over the lab in October the biggest thing I've learnt about is creditors and debtors - you need cashflow coming in, it doesn't just come to you, you have to

go and get it. The emphasis is on quality work but you have to know when to stop, it's easy to go overboard and produce something that's not worth it.

I've also spent a lot of time going out and getting clients, learning about how to approach people. Staff issues have taught me about employment law. It's all been on the management side - I'm now dialling back on the practical/technical side of my job, it's 60% business and 40% technical.

Plenty of technicians think they can run a lab, but until you're doing it you don't realise what's involved. A key thing for me is time management, which goes back to John and having timing sheets, to work out the average time spent per job. Having figures for everything means you can quantify it, you can manage workloads and structure your day - I don't believe in staying in the lab for so long that you burn yourself out.

Technicians have to control their work, not have the work control them. I look for quality, quantity, productivity and consistency - in that order.

Q. How important is continuing education for you and your team?

I believe you have to lay the groundwork first, then when the core skills are there and a technician has time in their day then I can look to move then into something else where they can work and learn. There is lots of on job training which goes on here but only when it's worthwhile for the business.

Some people expect training straight away and to get paid for it, right after they've paid for their own qualification. Technicians also qualify and want to be doing high-level private work straight away, but they need to be good at the basics first. If someone can't make a bite block

properly then why should they be doing full dentures for a private patient?

You have to work with people while keeping your business mind on, once you have built up trust then you can develop staff and give them opportunities.

Q. What are the future aims of the lab?

We are looking to expand and take on new clients, as well as focussing on the Swissdent system and getting that name back out there.

I've already added more staff and it's a long-term aim to get back to the size of the lab in its heyday under John when he had 40 people working here - there's lots to do before that though!

Q. What are your top tips for maintaining a successful laboratory?

Time management is key, for any business, not just a dental laboratory. As is knowing your costs, I know the cost down to penny of pouring a model, along with the time needed for the job. When stuff is really nailed down like that you know where you can and can't save time and money - I know we're very efficient.

Other advice for technicians is to learn the business side and don't neglect it. And always: quality, quantity, productivity and consistency.

Recently I've had a lot of reps from dental companies come in to the lab and they've been surprised how much work we still had, considering UDAS are almost up, as they said 90% of the labs were dead and in their words 'we know through the grapevine you guys aren't cheap'. Well, they don't pay for a product they pay for a service as I see, the product is a part of the service.