

MOTIVATED FOR SUCCESS AND BALANCE

Grace Lee, DDS, is a powerhouse dentist with a vision that's led to exceptional growth, a happy team and satisfied patients.



**Grace
Lee, DDS**
Lakeview Smiles
of Chicago

The story of Dr. Grace Lee's career is one of dedication, drive, determination and success. After graduating from the Ohio State University with dual degrees in human nutrition and chemistry, she earned her DDS from the OSU College of Dentistry. She spent four years as an associate and loved doing dentistry, but she felt she wasn't providing the type of care she knew she could. "I never really felt like I was able to provide the best care to patients," she recalls, "maybe because, when you're an associate, you use whatever tools and technology the owner has in the office. I just always felt limited. I knew there were better ways to do things out there and that I wanted to do something on my own."



TAKING THE FIRST PLUNGE



In 2008, Lee purchased her first practice, an existing office in the Lakeview area of Chicago. “It was a small part-time practice – the doctor didn’t even have a computer,” she explains. “So, we had to totally remodel. I got Ikea furniture, but for the dental equipment, I always had the best. I started very small but we grew really fast.”

With only three operatories, she increased the practice revenue from \$125,000 to \$750,000 in one year by adding Dentsply Sirona CEREC CAD/CAM and same-day dentistry to her services. She also purchased a Dentsply Sirona CBCT. Soon, her annual revenue was \$1.6 million, which she maintained for three years. That office now brings in \$3.5 million. “Adding the technology was huge for me,” she explains.

EXCEPTIONAL GROWTH

Patterson Dental sales rep Elizabeth Kardel advised Lee to meet with a consultant to discuss the growth she was experiencing. After analyzing her numbers she told Lee she needed eight more hygiene chairs. “I said, ‘We don’t have room for eight more chairs! We are in the city and my landlord says there’s no more room.’ So I started looking for a second office mainly because we didn’t know where to put all our patients,” Lee recalls.

She describes how Kardel, equipment specialist Michael Wharff, and technology rep Michael Maston all had her back. “I got three different text messages from three different Patterson reps on the same day telling me I had to check out an opportunity for a new space just down the street. I looked at the space, bought it, and now we’re in a six-operator office. It’s about one mile away from our original office. I got lucky because a lot of my patients ended up moving into this neighborhood. So, we were pretty busy from the start. Now, once again, we grew too big! We have about 80 to 90 new patients per month and our waiting period for new patients is three months.”

This growth led to opening the Logan Square/Bucktown office, which is named after the neighborhoods it’s nestled between. Lee liked the neighborhood, but after looking at numerous spaces, hadn’t found the right fit. “We were driving by this triangular building one day that looked like a bank that had been closed for a while and I said, ‘What about that building? Is that on the market?’ My realtor didn’t think it would work for my plan of six operatories because it’s only 2,200 square feet. So, I sent him to Mike Wharff, who likes to design offices, to see if we could make this work. And he was able to fit six ops in there.”



Lee’s two offices feature similar yet distinct décor, described as energetic, modern and hip. “We’re in the city where a lot of our patients are in their 30s and 40s and just starting their careers. They come to us because we have all the technologies. When I designed the office, I had that in mind and knew it needed to be attractive looking as

well. I didn't want it to look like a dental office. I wanted it to look like a place where you want to hang out. So, that's the energy – comfortable."



The expansion, as well as patient demand, led Lee to needing more hands on deck. Her "four amazing associates" – Dr. Melinda Rosen (who was an assistant and clinical manager at the practice before she attended dental school), Dr. Will Hardenbergh, Dr. Shohreh Raof, and Dr. Anthony Besse – are all "full time and really busy," Lee notes.

Lee soon began meeting other doctors who wanted to join her team. "They were very impressed with how we are doing." Dr. Maria Jones, an orthodontist, has joined the team full time and several other specialists work for the practice part time. "I have a really awesome, talented team, which also includes 27 staff members. Because we can't fit them all at one location, it just makes sense to continue to expand and to do more for our patients."

Lee believes in empowering and educating everyone on her staff and making sure they have what they need.

Lee is in the process of opening two more practices this year, and has another associate joining the group soon as well as an orthodontist. "We're currently building a practice near Chicago Midway International Airport, and another one in Edgewater."

She chose those locations to accommodate staff members who live in those areas and have begun to tire of their long commutes. "The way our offices are structured, we don't have one manager who manages everything; we have coordinators," she explains. "We grow our team members and empower them in what they do so that they become good leaders. Two of our really amazing leaders were commuting pretty far. We used to joke about building new offices so they wouldn't have to travel so long. And then the joke became a reality!"



TECHNOLOGY FRONT AND CENTER

The Lakeview location has a small welcoming area. "I always keep my waiting rooms small because we don't like to have patients wait. We keep the time they are waiting very short," Lee explains. The rest of the practice includes a business office, consultation rooms, hygiene rooms and surgical operatories. "We used to have the CEREC milling unit right by the hygiene rooms because we wanted to show it off. When it ended up running all day long, the hygienists told me it was getting

too loud! So we moved it to the back. We have both Primescan and Omnicam at the Lakeview location, and they're very busy all the time, too.



Lee says the triangle-shaped Logan Square/Bucktown office is structured a little differently, but technology plays a lead part there as well. “Intraoral imaging is pretty big in our office,” she says. “We take pictures of everything and the patients really appreciate it. We don’t do a single treatment plan without showing them visually what the capabilities are.” Because everything is done in-house using digital technologies, Lee can use the images to design a CEREC restoration or a surgical plan and guide. “When patients walk in and say, ‘I need an implant’ and they want it the same day, I can design everything within 45 minutes.”

KEEPING IT BALANCED

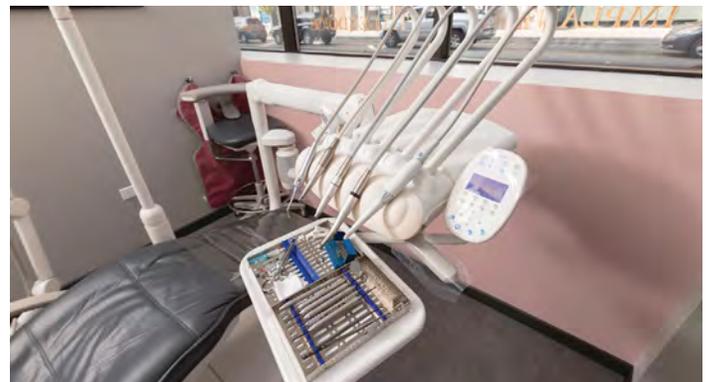
Technology has allowed Lee to streamline her workflows, and it’s impacted the way she practices. “I’m a single mom,” she explains. “Especially through the pandemic, I cut my hours so I could be with my two school-age sons. Having two beautiful offices with an amazing team enabled me to balance my personal life with work, and that’s what I emphasize to all my team members. I want them to have a really great life at work and at home. I am a big supporter of a balanced life. That’s very important to me and I’m sure it’s very important to everyone. So, with same-day dentistry, I work three or four hours a day, from 9 to 12. But whatever patients need, we make it happen.”

Lee explains that her role as a dentist is very different now. “I don’t do bread-and-butter dentistry anymore, mainly because I have wonderful associates who can take care of that. I do more of the complex cases. I’m almost like a treatment coordinator – meaning some cases require very complex treatment planning, especially if we end up involving multiple specialists. I do a lot of the game planning. I need to know what’s best for the patient’s situation and to get the best results clinically. I do a lot to support my doctors.”

Technology has made it easier for Lee to work remotely, including virtual consults, patient education and treatment planning. “I can pretty much treatment plan everything from home. I bought smartphones for my team to use as work phones, because we found that we can do a lot remotely with our technology.”

WORKING WITH PATTERSON DENTAL

Lee has been working with Patterson Dental for 14 years. She says that having a good support team watching her back and looking out for her has been an incredible experience. They recognize her needs and meet them fast. “If we say we need something, they’ll ship it right out to me,” Lee notes. “Or if something breaks or stops working, Patterson will show up even quicker than they say they will most of the time. Having that kind of support is amazing. Also, Mike and Elizabeth know my situation and what I’m looking for. If I’m looking for a doctor, they connect me with one who’s been looking for this type of position. It’s nice having multiple people looking out for me and being there when I need them.”



Lee compares the Patterson team's service to a luxury industry.

Lee compares the Patterson team's service to a luxury industry. "As a single mom, I actually love staying in luxury hotels and resorts because when you go there, there are no excuses. There are no answers like, 'No, we don't do that or we don't have it.' If they don't have it, they'll go and get it. That's how I feel about Patterson. Their attitude is that they have the solution. Anything, you name it, they have the solution. I love it."

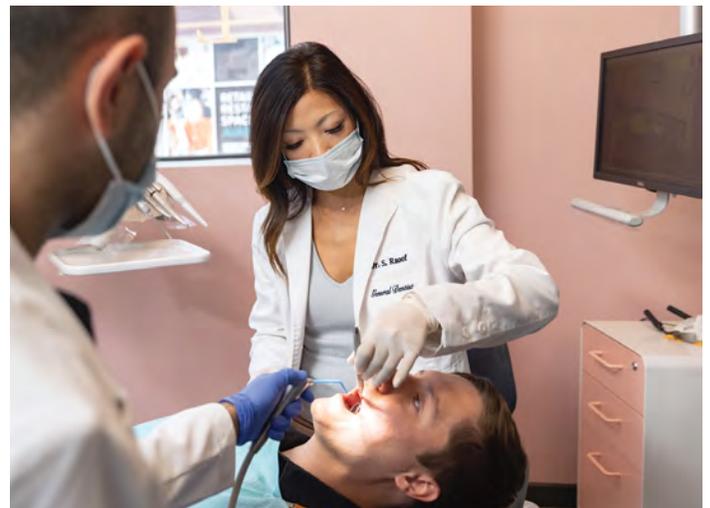
MAINTAINING A BALANCED LIFE

That can-do attitude fits in with Lee's approach to life and leading her team members. For example, she is very supportive of single mothers like herself. There was a time when her staff was predominantly single moms. "We have a mix now so I can't say that they're all single moms today, but I'm a good supporter of empowering my team members," Lee says. "I just believe in encouraging single moms because if I can do it, you can do it. I mean, you can be a business owner, you can have a successful career and you also can be an amazing mom all at the same time."



She believes in empowering and educating everyone on her staff and making sure they have everything they need to do their jobs and enjoy their lives. "When you surround yourself with talented, amazing people who care for each other, I think things will always come together and work out."

Lee also believes in giving back to the community. She has twice volunteered her services at a clinic in Mongolia for weeks at a time as well as one in Nicaragua. She also volunteers at the Lawndale Dental Center clinic in Chicago. She's dedicated her life to serving people in need through compassionate dentistry and figured out how to balance that with what makes her life fulfilling – business success and a happy family.



WORKING WITH A MOTIVATED DENTIST

Wharff and Kardel describe Dr. Grace Lee as a powerhouse. "That's the one word that comes to mind for her," they agree.

"She was motivated to be different while she was an associate," Wharff says. "She saw patients leaving that practice to see specialists and decided to provide a different experience. She embraced CBCT technology as well as CEREC and offers just about every procedure any specialist can do: endo, implants, cosmetic cases, and soon orthodontics and airway and sleep dentistry."



Wharff says Lee is seeing 90 to 110 new patients a month per location. “Just imagine all the opportunity that comes in,” he continues. “We’re talking about downtown Chicago where there is a dentist on every corner. But the patient experience is so strong because of her technology and the unique dynamics and energy there. It’s not just how much they care, but also how smart and talented they are. That’s what I think makes Lakeview Smiles stand out.”

Kardel adds that Lee is quick to pick up a new concept and just runs with it. “When she sees that something is going to be successful and beneficial, she adopts it.”

Wharff and Kardel helped Lee outfit her first practice, find and develop her second one and are now coordinating the planning, construction and clinical logistics of her third and fourth offices.



“The reclaimed bank building was really unique to design for the Patterson design group,” Wharff comments. “Knowing how busy she is, we wanted to maximize literally every minute of clinical

workflow in that new practice. For example, we showed her the efficiency of the A-dec sterilization center to meet CDC protocols. She wanted that to be the centerpiece of the office design and work out from there. So we devised protocols for moving materials from the operatories with greater efficiency. That was one area we knew we could improve upon in her second office versus her first.”

Having a safe, consistent process for following CDC protocols is more important than ever today to ensure safety for both patients and the dental team. It also increases productivity and available chair time, Wharff explains. “If we can save even one or two minutes per operatory during the day, that adds up.”



“Especially for her,” Kardel adds. “Her volume is at two or three times the normal practice. She knows efficiency is everything. That’s also why good service is so important for her. She does split shifts and is open from 8 until 8 a lot of days, so that all makes a big difference.”

CREATING EFFICIENCIES

Wharff and Kardel took Lee to see A-dec’s Inspire cabinets for her second office. “We demonstrated that the dentist and assistant are like a pilot and copilot, and the cabinet is the cockpit with everything within reach in a designated place,” Kardel explains. “She could envision her procedures and point out any inefficiency. Having everything within reach made sense to her.”

ALWAYS IMPROVING

Kardel says Lee also focuses on empowering and mentoring her staff. “She prioritizes furthering their education,” Kardel says. “She knows you have to work at growth and learning new things. She is also really good at setting goals and sets targets for what she wants and then figures out how to get there.”



“She is very focused on what she wants her patient experience and practice lifestyle to be,” Wharff adds, “and she demands that of her staff and her doctors. She’s constantly pushing the limits to be better. When you do that, you’re able to take things to another level and she’s obviously done that within her practice.”



“One of the great things about having Patterson as a partner is that we care enough to study the clinical workflow and make sure tools are being used efficiently,” Wharff says. “When you invest in equipment, we want you to use it the way it was designed to be used. That makes a huge difference with the amount of volume she does in a day.”

According to Wharff and Kardel, Lee has a great relationship with her team and is dedicated to identifying and taking care of what is needed in the practice. “When they need something, they need it right away,” Kardel says. “Just staying in touch is important if something essential breaks. Our service department is fantastic and usually can send a technician there fast. But they often take a backup just in case they can’t fix something.”

Wharff points out that Lee also thought about symmetry among her soon-to-be total of 25 operatories in four different offices. “In a practice this busy, they have to share employees,” he explains. “When you go from one place to another, you need to be using the same equipment and technology, or at least the same brand with similar setups, to remain efficient. Our partner, Dentsply Sirona, gives multiple levels of training on their technology and they will go back multiple times for additional training. The symmetry and the partnership between A-dec, Dentsply Sirona and Patterson is also a key to success. I think it’s been a motivating factor for Dr. Lee to stay in this partnership.”

Ready to explore how the right equipment and technology investments can spur growth in your practice?

Contact your Patterson rep