

# When There's a Will

by Chelsea Patten,  
Staff Writer,  
*Dentaltown Magazine*

*Dr. Simone Ellis is right out of school. She waited no time at all before establishing her own practice, which she built from the ground up, following a strict budget and using all the resources she had available. A year later she'll be the first one to say she learns something new every day and is tackling the challenges which come with a new practice head-on. Dentaltown Magazine had the opportunity to visit with Dr. Ellis to see how her fresh ideas have affected the practice of dentistry.*



*Photography by Paul Howell*

Have you always known you wanted to go into dentistry? What inspired your decision?

**Ellis:** I was seven when I went to the dentist with my father. He had to get teeth taken out because he had periodontal disease. I was fascinated by the procedure. I came home and told my mom "I want to be a dentist." She put me in all these summer programs and really pushed the sciences to help me make that a reality. I was really fortunate to know at a young age.

What are some of the challenges you came across when you graduated from dental school? Any brush realizations? Anything that went exactly as you had expected?

**Ellis:** I was amazed at how different things were in dental school than they are in the real world. I think in dental school they present you with the most ideal situations with the most practical solutions. Unfortunately, that's not really a reality. When you're dealing with patients, there are so many factors. People have different priorities that affect their decision making. I can't begin to tell you how many people come in for Zoom Whitening when their first concern should really be that they have a lot of cavities, decay and gum disease... You have to accommodate patients based on their wants and needs, decide what your standard of care is and then come up with a plan together.

You started your practice from scratch. How did you keep to a budget? What are the steps you took to build it?

**Ellis:** I had a number in mind. I tried to find different ways to stick to that number.

I was lucky to find a second-generation office that was in a very busy area. The building was completely empty but the foundation had already been laid. Because the foundation was already here I didn't have to spend a lot of money with build-out costs.

I was able to hire an interior decorator who was able to develop a color scheme and gave the office elements that I wanted. I bought a lot of used equipment. I bought two used dental chairs and got them reupholstered. And then I bought two new

## Office Highlights

### Bonding Agents

- Adper Easy Bond  
Self-etch Adhesive

### Burs

- Axis Burs

### Cements

- FujiCEM
- RelyX Unicem

### Impression Materials

- 3M ESPE Impregum  
Penta Soft Heavy Body

### Patient Financing

- CareCredit Financing
- In-office Financing

### Restorative

- Dentsply Esthet-X Flow
- 3M Supreme Ultra  
Packable Composite

### Technology

- Eaglesoft
- ScanX Radiograph

Name: **Simone Ellis, DMD**

Graduate From: **University of Medicine and  
Dentistry in New Jersey**

Practice Name: **Smile Design Studios  
Missouri City, Texas**

Year when this office opened: **2010**

Web site: **www.sdshouston.com**



continued on page 74

dental chairs. I bought a used air water compressor and vacuum. I bought a used panoramic digital X-ray machine and a sterilizer. I was slightly over my budget but not drastically because you don't have to buy everything brand new. There are so many different ways to save and be resourceful.

Also a lot of people who open new offices are only able to equip two rooms. But by doing it the way I did, I was able to equip all four and I'm so happy that I did. The way we're growing, sometimes I really do need to accommodate four people and I can!

What gave you the foresight to plan for four rooms versus two?

**Ellis:** I know of a couple of doctors who had maximized their budget with two rooms. I knew eventually I was going to want four rooms. I knew I would want to hire a hygienist at one point. I knew I would hopefully have an associate doctor at some point – right there, that's two rooms.



*Dr. Ellis (second from right) and her Smile Design Studios team.*

What motivated your decision to start your own practice rather than joining an existing one?

**Ellis:** Finding a place to be an associate was a lot more difficult than I expected. There are so many different philosophies on how to practice dentistry. I realized that in order to do dentistry the way that I wanted to do it I had to share the same philosophy as the owning doctor. I knew how I wanted to practice dentistry and it was difficult to find someone who shared that vision.

What resources did you use to find equipment, building vacancies, contractors, etc. for building your practice?

**Ellis:** One of my professors told me to contact local supply companies and speak to representatives who could help me with my transition from New Jersey to Houston. Two Patterson representatives helped me to get the ball rolling for the transition. They

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**Allen Pulsipher, DDS, MD**  
Graduate, Baylor College of Dentistry, 1983  
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knew my goals for my budget, so they were able to work with me.

Because they're selling new equipment, they know where the old equipment is going. The reps helped me to find equipment and to make sure it was good equipment.

I didn't really know about all the Dentaltown online classifieds when I was setting all this up. It would have been a great resource.

#### What is your number-one priority?

**Ellis:** I try to be really caring and concerned about the patient. People want to know that there is a person attached to a tooth, not just a tooth.

Also, I make it a priority to help patients understand if they don't have a good foundation, it's hard to build upon it. Whatever they are investing in their mouths, it comes with responsibilities.

It makes a difference as far as case acceptance too. If you care what happens to the patient, they can sense that.

#### What is your practice like?

**Ellis:** I have a spa-like atmosphere. It's about relaxing and changing the mentality that comes with the dentist. People are terrified to come to the dentist so I try to make it a different experience so patients don't have the same anxiety about going to the dentist. When they walk into the door, they know something is different.

I also want patients to know they are part of our family here. I want to grow up with these families! I want them to have their kids come here. I want to be the dentist that their grandkids come to. It's more to me than just that one person. It's a relationship that I want to form. I'm not just here as a dentist office. I want the relationships and the sense of community to be apparent.

#### Describe a typical day in your office.

**Ellis:** I laugh at this question. No day is typical! Each day brings its own challenges and changes. We have been blessed to be continually growing. We average five to 10 patients a day. We try to do as much treatment in the morning so we can call patients in the afternoon. Since we are still fairly new, we try to take as many in a day as possible.

**When you opened your practice in mid-2010, you added CareCredit's patient financing program right away. How did you feel it would benefit your new practice and your patients?**

**Ellis:** I felt CareCredit offered opportunities for patients to better afford treatment and not be so financially restricted. CareCredit allowed my office to not play a bank.

**What advice would you give students entering dental school? How about students just graduating from dental school?**

**Ellis:** To students entering: Remember why you chose this profession and remind yourself every day. Let's be honest, den-



## Simone's Top Five

### 3M Position Penta Quick Impression Material

"It has multiple purposes for my office. Whether it is making temps, taking initial impressions, using these impressions for diagnostic wax up or impressions for dentures or partials, it is an awesome product!"

### Zoom In-office Whitening

"Patient love the improved results."

### 3M Fluoride Varnish and OMNI Gel

"Love it for my child patients because I know that they are getting fluoride protection after they leave my office."

### Peridex Oral Rinse

"It is easy to market Peridex to my patients because I make it a standard of care. If you have gingivitis or perio, it becomes a part of your treatment plan. I believe in making sure that my patients have all of the tools to help them maintain a healthy smile!"

### Ivoclar Telio CS C&B

"This is great for temporaries!"

tal school is not fun. It's really tough – all those late nights studying. In order not to drive yourself crazy you have to know what your purpose is. I can't begin to tell you how many times I wanted to walk away but I remembered that I wanted to be a dentist so badly and had made sacrifices to be there. I wasn't about to give up on that dream so easily and besides I was already in too much debt to walk away!

*continued on page 76*

To recent graduates: You can make better smiles with just two hands – how cool is that! You will affect people’s lives in so many ways. It’s an amazing and exciting profession!

We won’t sugarcoat it – the typical dentist is an older white male. You’ve gone against the norm. What is it like to be a young woman of color in the dental field?

**Ellis:** As a woman, this is a great career to have. You have a lot of control of your schedule.

Really where I find my discrimination is my age. I thought that it would be skin color but it’s not! I’m 27. I opened my practice at 26. People seem to question my abilities because of how old I am. I just had a patient who told me I was young enough to be her daughter. People expect to see an older gentleman. I’m okay with that misconception because I’m changing it every day! My work speaks for itself.

What is your favorite procedure to perform?

**Ellis:** Anything prost! Crown and bridge is my favorite. I get a rush pulling teeth too. [laughs]

What would you say is your biggest source of new patients and how do you market to get new patients?

**Ellis:** Word of mouth is our biggest source of new patients. When I first opened, I used a lot of money toward different marketing methods to see what works. We did mailers, a billboard. I seem to get the most patients from community events. I don’t just send my staff. I actually go myself. People then know that I care enough to actually go!

Who are some of your mentors?

**Ellis:** My mom is my biggest cheerleader. That seems typical, but this lady has been awesome for me! Also, I’m inspired to be better because I have siblings. I want to be an example.

What do you like to do when you are not working? Tell me a little about your family.

**Ellis:** I was fortunate to marry my college sweetheart, Rasul. I take care of Khloe and Kona, my two adorable Yorkshire terriers. And I like to travel.

I realized when I opened my office that there is always something to do there. However, I also know that my family is important. I take a lot of cooking classes. I’m just now getting into scrapbooking. I want to start taking ballroom dancing. I just have to figure out how to incorporate all these things into my schedule. Life’s too short to just pick one thing! ■

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