

Drs. Rafay Hussain

Two lifelong friends who run pediatric practices starting new offices, the lessons kids can teach and

OFFICE HIGHLIGHTS

Name and credentials:

Rafay Hussain, DDS
Rupin Malhotra, DDS

Graduated from:

Case Western
Reserve University
School of Dental Medicine

Practice name:

Bitesize Pediatric Dentistry

Practice locations:

Williamsburg, Brooklyn,
and Park Slope, Brooklyn

Practice size:

Williamsburg: 1,400 sq. ft.
Park Slope: 1,000 sq. ft

Team size: 12

Website:

wearebitesize.com



and Rupin Malhotra

in Brooklyn talk about the intricacies of how to thrive in the saturated New York market



by Kyle Patton, associate editor,
Dentaltown magazine

Dentists spend most of their working hours in their practices, so they usually don't get many opportunities to see what it's like inside another doctor's office. *Dentaltown* magazine's recurring Office Visit profile offers a chance for Townies to meet their peers, hear their stories and get a sense of their practice protocols.

In this issue, meet Drs. Rafay Hussain and Rupin Malhotra, friends who've set up not one but two thriving pediatric practices in the heart of Brooklyn. Their offices, both named Bitesize Pediatric Dentistry, show how it can pay to stay young at heart while still taking a chomp out of the New York market.





Tell us about yourselves and how you got into dentistry.

Dr. Raf Hussain: I never thought about being a dentist when I was younger. I took a jewelry making class in college to meet girls. Several people in the class were taking it as a prerequisite for dental school, which sparked my interest. The more I investigated the world of dentistry, the more I discovered that it was a very good fit for me.

Dr. Rupin Malhotra: I've always had an affinity for details and precision. I'm also not a complacent individual—I love constantly learning. Dentistry allows me to channel that. I didn't realize that dentistry and I would be such a good fit when I was young; It wasn't until I learned that my friend was going to dental school that I entertained the idea of being a dentist too. The more I learned about dentistry, the more I realized that there was a career out there that was a good match for me.

You two met while undergrads at Case Western University, then went to its dental school. After your GP residencies, both of you ended up working in New York City. How did you link back up to start pediatric practices?



Hussain: We've known each other since we were 18 years old—we were even roommates throughout undergrad and dental school. When in New York, we found ourselves working as associates at GP offices and shared similar frustrations of not feeling satisfied in our respective positions. As with most associate positions, we found ourselves at the low end of the totem pole, seeing the patients that the senior doctors didn't want to—which, in both our cases, was pediatric patients. We thought it was exciting to treat children but it was also frustrating, because we lacked the training to treat all children effectively. We'd often get together to discuss our frustrations, share techniques and offer each other advice on how to handle certain situations. At some point during those conversations, it dawned on us that we should go back and get the training we required so that we could be more effective at doing something we enjoyed.

How do each of your personalities, strengths and even weaknesses play off each other's to create such a successful dynamic?

Malhotra: We had heard the warnings about going into business with friends, but we felt that we had a unique experience in that we met at a young age and grew up and trained together. It suited us well to go into business together. Although we are similar from a clinical perspective, we have unique strengths and balance each other out. We obviously both get anxious about certain aspects of the practice, but we seem to

focus on different things—which allows one individual to provide the other with a little perspective so we don't lose the forest in the trees, so to speak. Creating a startup dental practice is stressful. It's very helpful to have someone you trust who can share the burden with you throughout all the pitfalls. We look at other colleagues who did startups and we feel as if they had a much more stressful time than we did. We had each other to rely on.

A lot of GPs aren't always fond of pediatric patients and the challenges that come with them, but both of you discovered a love for treating children and teens. What are some of the benefits of treating kids all day?

Hussain: There are good days and bad days, just like in any field. But in general, our days are just *fun*. Kids live in the moment. And we're constantly trying to provide our patients with a good experience, so this means our days are full of positive energy. There's also the notion of being able to frame how a child views oral health and set them up to carry that mindset into adulthood. Having that type of impact on someone is so rewarding.

What are some challenges or situations that GPs might not consider when it comes to treating pediatric patients all day?

Hussain: There is never a quiet moment. You are always engaging the patient. I think sometimes when treating adult patients, we find our groove or "flow state" and we get quiet while concentrating with the procedure at hand. With pediatric patients, you're constantly talking and engaging. You don't really want a lull of silence with young children, because that's when most kids start to get anxious. Sometimes it's tell-show-do, sometimes it's just being funny or comforting. ... You always want to be engaging them as much as possible.

The Bitesize website is a blend of modern simplicity and cartoonish fun. You even have a "Bitesize Gang," a collection of characters with backstories and distinct personalities. How do patients and parents react? Is this a theme that also carries over from the website into the physical practice?

Malhotra: We gave a lot of thought to our brand when coming up with the concept, and we rely heavily on it when it comes to media and marketing materials.





TOP 5 PRODUCTS

- 1. Isolite (Zyris).** It has provided our office a comfortable alternative for isolation.
- 2. Ultradent Valo curing light.** The decrease in curing times has been very helpful with treating children.
- 3. Advantage Arrest-SDF.** Helps when treating our high-caries-risk patients and those with challenging behaviors.
- 4. ScanX phosphor plates.** A “kid-friendly” alternative to other digital radiography systems. It has enhanced our practice efficiency.
- 5. Fuji IX capsules.** For challenging patients, a great alternative to conventional composite restorations. Easy to use and has the benefit of releasing rechargeable fluoride.

Patients and parents love the characters! They’re a unique element to the practice that I think parents and patients appreciate, and don’t seem like an afterthought to the office. We tried to come up with a concept that was intertwined with the practice. That being said, we’re also always trying to find the balance of not going too over the top. Themes are nice initially, but they get dated very quickly. It’s difficult to keep older children engaged when they think they’re in an office for little kids. We think we’ve struck the right chord where children, young and older, feel comfortable in the Bitesize environment.

Let’s talk about an average day in the practice. How do you like to arrange things? Have you changed anything up from when you first started practicing that’s worked out great for you?

Hussain: We start the day with a morning huddle with the team. We schedule treatment appointments for the mornings, and our afternoon is primarily reserved



for hygiene appointments. When we first began, we didn't give much thought to scheduling and we were just trying to fill up our schedule any way we could. Now that the office is more mature, we are constantly trying new things with scheduling to optimize the flow and patient experience.

You now have two locations, both in Brooklyn. At what point did you know it was time to open a second practice?

Malhotra: Our second practice essentially grew out of necessity. We were successful with our first location quickly. Over time, though, we found that some of the families we were seeing were moving deeper into Brooklyn. Initially, they would all try to continue to see us, but it was a cumbersome commute. We realized if families were coming all this way to continue to see us, there must be a real need in that area.

In New York you have a huge population to draw potential patients from, but at the same time you're in an area heavily saturated with other dentists. What's been your approach on marketing and new patient generation? What's worked for you?



Hussain: New York is a difficult market. Traditional marketing approaches like mailers tend to be ineffective. We rely heavily on word-of-mouth through lot of parent message groups on Facebook and Slack. We believe that our branding has been helpful, especially on social media. People seem to really enjoy our use of the Bitesize characters with our online marketing.

Give us a snapshot of your lives outside of the practices.

Hussain: I love living in New York. There is always something happening, whether it be a show, restaurant or grabbing a drink with friends. That being said, it's just as easy for me to retreat into a quiet lifestyle with my dog whenever I feel the need.

Malhotra: Having two small children, a lot of my free time revolves around them. With my wife and kids, we enjoy trying new restaurants, sporting events and exploring Brooklyn and Manhattan. ■

OTHER PRODUCTS

Adhesives/bonding
Prime & Bond NT
from Dentsply

Burs
HSI carbide and
diamond burs from
Henry Schein

Chair
Forest Dental

Cements
Ketac Cem

Finance
Bank of America

Practice management
Open Dental

Restoratives
• Fuji IX from GC America
• Photac Fil from 3M

Technology
Yapi