

Why I Want to Practice Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

When I started dental school at the University of North Carolina, my understanding of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery was limited to complex extractions and implants. I respected the field, but I didn't fully grasp the scope. That changed quickly as I progressed in my didactic courses. I started to notice a pattern: if a suspicious bony lesion showed up on a panorex, the answer was, "Send it to OMFS". A severely impacted tooth? Send it to OMFS. Facial trauma or a broken jaw? Send it to OMFS. I didn't realize it at the time, but this theme really stuck with me. I decided to start studying for the CBSE during my first year of dental school, even though I wasn't 100% sure of OMFS at the time. I took the studying seriously and sat for the test twice my first year, earning a score I was proud of on my second attempt. Even though I didn't know OMFS was for me at the start of studying for the CBSE, by the end, I was confident it was what I wanted to do. I noticed my classmates would come to me for help during our biomedical science courses or anything that involved medicine. I grew to like that feeling, and I think that's why the pattern from before stuck with me. After hearing the phrase "Send it to OMFS" so many times, I started to realize that's who I wanted to be. Ultimately, when a case is too complex for standard care, I want to be the person who is able to help the patient and a colleague.

Mixed in with my CBSE studying during my first year, I spent a lot of time in the operating room and OMFS clinic, shadowing and absorbing what the specialty was actually about. I remember the first OR case I ever shadowed as a first-year dental student. Watching Dr. Turvey perform a Le Fort I, BSSO, and genioplasty opened my eyes to the unique space OMFS holds in both dentistry and medicine. Seeing surgeons repair facial trauma and resect large benign pathologies shifted my entire perspective. I noticed that even though I get satisfaction from completing a filling or a crown, it just doesn't compare to assisting in life-altering OR cases. There is something incredibly powerful about being a surgeon who can step in on a patient's absolute worst day and offer them real hope.

The last piece of the puzzle that made me 100% sure OMFS was for me was that the more time I spent around OMFS attendings and residents, the more I realized I fit right in with them. I am constantly pushing myself to learn and improve and have an internal drive that can be difficult to turn off at times. This is a trait I have found to be very common in the OMF surgeons I have met, but it is something I feel many of my classmates, friends, and family do not completely understand. This definitely impacts the relationships I have with my closest friends and family, as they all share the opinion that I work too much. However, I have found ways to cope and make sure I don't burn out. I physically separate myself from my computer and phone, and I channel that energy into going for a run with a close friend or throwing the football in the yard. I know how to put my head down and work, but I'm also learning how to manage my time and resources so I can do well in residency when time with my family and friends will be even more limited.

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Ultimately, I view joining the field of OMFS as a way to provide for my family by serving the community I join after residency. The entire reason I went into healthcare was to use my hands to fix problems for people who need it. Throughout dental school, I've tried to put that into action locally and globally. Whether it was spending five days on a CMDA clinical mission trip to Treasure Beach, Jamaica, delivering free care and extracting impacted third molars, or co-founding the AMOR Clinic to serve troubled youth and the migrant community in the North Carolina Triangle area, the goal has always been the same. Looking ahead, whether I end up in private practice or academics, I plan on providing full-scope service to my community. Coming from a rural area in Eastern North Carolina where access to care is limited, I know exactly what happens when people don't have a safety net. I want to maintain hospital privileges, take facial trauma call, and manage complex benign pathology reconstruction, so that people who come from a rural area like the one I grew up in, and will likely return to, will have access to the full scope of OMFS and the life-altering procedures it can provide. I am looking for an OMFS residency that will push me, surround me with the best in the field, and give me the training I need to be the provider who can step up to the needs of my community