

Practice of the month: Shields Dental & Implant Clinic

Conor Shields – alongside his twin brother and colleague **Cormac Shields** – looks at how the team tripled the size of their practice in three years



Dr Conor Shields with his twin brother Dr Cormac Shields



Shields Dental, based in Limerick

Dr Conor Shields & Dr Cormac Shields

Principal dentists and twins, Conor and Cormac graduated from The Royal London Hospital in 1994. After qualifying, both completed VT in London and in 1998 invested in Altmore Dental Practice in Canary Wharf London. In 2006, they moved back home to Ireland and set up Shields Dental & Implant Clinic in Limerick. Both are accredited by the Eastman Dental Institution in London after completing a postgraduate diploma in restorative dentistry. They have also completed postgraduate training with the British Society of Occlusal Studies and are active members. Conor has undertaken advanced implant training within the Eastman and completed his postgraduate diploma in dental sedation in Guy's Hospital.

Myself and my identical twin brother, Cormac, are both third-generation dentists in Limerick.

Our grandfather Frank qualified as one of the first dental surgeons in Tyrone in 1917, and our father Frank is a retired dental surgeon in Dungannon, who was a pioneer in oral surgery and sedation.

We trained in London, where we ran a NHS/private dental practice for seven years. But in 2006, we wanted to move back to Ireland and to Limerick in particular, where our mother Mary is from. That's where we established Shields Dental & Implant Clinic as a private practice in the same year.

We wanted to move away from mixed NHS/private dentistry and provide the best dental

THINGS THAT DIDN'T MATTER 10 YEARS AGO HAVE BECOME AN ONGOING LEARNING CURVE

care that we believed in. We set up a private squat, with Cormac and I as the principal dentists heading a small team of a part-time hygienist, two nurses and a receptionist.

In 2008, the objective was to survive the recession. The practice achieved this with many years of hard work, but in essence, the practice had plateaued, neither in decline but



The team has grown extensively, and now includes a full-time treatment coordinator



Shields Dental went through numerous business and design renovations

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certainly not in growth. We knew we had to do something.

Planning

After 10 years in Limerick, we reset our objectives. We knew we were a great clinical practice, but with limited business acumen. In order for the clinical environment to thrive, it needed to be underpinned by a strong business backbone.

At the end of 2015, we decided to invest

in a review process. The first step was to hire Jonathan Fine from Fine Company to assess all areas of the practice and to establish a pathway forward.

Jonathan helped us plan the future of the business. This involved investment in new processes, infrastructure, equipment upgrades and, most importantly, in recruitment.

We had mismatched signage and no real identity. We began with a total rebrand, complete with a 'brand book' that has become our bible.

We chose a new logo and colour scheme that reflects who we are. We then needed new signage on the outside and inside of the building, new stationary, new embroidered

uniforms, and so on.

After being open for 10 years, our website was completely out of date. We chose to invest in a completely new one. It now had to be mobile-friendly with informative videos for our patients. Investment in SEO and learning about things like Google reviews became important. Things that didn't matter 10 years ago have become an ongoing learning curve.

Décor and furnishings

In terms of décor and furnishings, my wife Claire and Jonathan Fine led the way on those. We had done very little after the initial opening 10 years ago, apart from the odd coat of paint. So we updated nearly everything. Every wall

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was painted, the floors were replaced, cupboards built, and we paved the way for a dedicated children's waiting room.

Jonathan was adamant that the reception area was also redesigned. The telephone/marketing and accounts were removed from the front desk area and away from the waiting patients. We did this with a new glass pod and soundproofing. The front desk is now welcoming but private, with customer service at the forefront.

The waiting lounge was redesigned, aiming for a high-end coffee shop look or a relaxed airport lounge. We didn't want chairs in a row like we used to have. We added a tea and coffee making area and a fridge stocked with complementary water. A huge hit!

We made a feature wall by shelving an entire wall as a 'one-stop' dental shop. We added more dental products. We are selling more stock now and the patients love it.

We are constantly being complimented on the changes that we have made. Patients have seen a real positive difference.

On the clinical side, we invested in the right people. We looked for clinicians with great skill sets. We upgraded our OPT to a CT scanner. We had allowed space at the beginning for growth, and now as it was happening; we added a fourth surgery (that had been plumbed 10 years earlier in preparation) complete with screens on the ceiling and walls for patients to watch TV and see presentations.

The clinical team has now grown to include three full-time dental surgeons, and three part-time GDPs, two specialist orthodontists, a periodontist and a hygiene team.

Seven-day dentistry

A year into the process, we rolled out seven-day dentistry within the practice. The clinic operates a normal service, seven days a week. We managed to do this after building a group of clinicians who work the rota as a team.

Cormac and myself were also able to cut down from working five clinical days to just four. This means we can spend more time working on the business, as well as with our families.

Patient journey

Our patient journey is everything. It is now clearly defined and tracked. The gap between clinicians and admin has now been bridged with the introduction of our full-time dedicated treatment coordinator, who is there to support the patient through the whole journey, from beginning to end.

The future

It's been a great few years working with Jonathan and building our new team. We are happy with all the changes. We are excited to be opening a second site in October with a further site planned for March 2018.

Winning the award for Most Improved Practice at the Irish Dentistry Awards in January was a highlight. It felt great to be recognised for the hard work that everyone has put in to date.

The practice continues to grow and improve and we are currently building our fifth surgery to cope with demand. We now have a clear direction and are nowhere near finished! 



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