

# “Girls with dreams become women with a vision.”



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Interview conducted by Dr. Marjan Gilani

**With more women enrolling in dental schools, gender demographics are becoming more diverse. Nevertheless, the percentage of women as thought leaders at the forefront of dentistry is still less than their male peers. Prof. Ashvini Padhye answered our questions about her journey and how she sees the future of the women in regenerative dentistry.**

**Prof. Padhye, how did you decide to become a periodontist?**

**Prof. Padhye:** As a child I wanted to become a physician. but later I learned that I could not study medicine in my city, and I did not want to go to a boarding school, so I chose dentistry instead, and never regretted it for a single day. Both my parents were dentists. And I always wanted to get a postgraduate education in a surgical discipline. I love surgery. At the time in India, more advanced surgery was available only at a postgraduate level. I took up periodontics, went on to learn more, and then there was no looking back.

**Was being a woman ever a hurdle?**

Not really. I think it was a very smooth ride. My mentors were very supportive. Even though I had both male and female colleagues, I was always encouraged to come forward or present things, for example, at conferences.

But it was also because my family was extremely supportive throughout my journey. In a country like India one needs a lot of backing to be able to take the path I took. My parents and then my husband and children wanted me to be brave, fight for what I wanted and pursue my dreams.

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**We see more female thought leaders in dentistry than in the past. What does this mean for students and young dentists?**

When female key opinion leaders present at conferences, hold seminars and are so well-read and knowledgeable, it sends a very positive message. I think it is extremely inspiring when the students see so many women heading different departments at the university. In our college, seven department heads and the dean are all women. The students look up to them and feel that someday they can get there too.

**Can we say the gap between the number of female graduates and those who advance in their career is closing?**

Well, the gap is fortunately closing. But it is still huge. There is a lot to be done to actually close the gap.

A lot of women still cannot prioritize or compartmentalize what they want to do professionally and personally, and that's where we tend to fall back. Women take on many responsibilities just because they are women. Don't get me wrong. Despite managing my career, I have played various roles and duties on a personal front. I have been actively involved in upbringing my children who are now well-accomplished adults, I am an ardent cook, cater to everyone's taste buds, and besides all this, I find time to pursue my passions. I am a certified advanced deep-sea diver, a trained classical dancer, and I love sketching and painting. It's about trying to find that right balance. I think a lot of women don't feel good about doing something like professional training for themselves if it keeps them away from their families. We need to stop feeling that way; we need to stop denying our dreams.

## Is this gap uniformly distributed over the different domains of dentistry?

Not at all. In India more women enroll in dental schools than men. However, when you look at the forefront, speakers at conferences and the recognized opinion leaders, most are men. Women tend to stay in their comfort zone, e.g., in general practices instead of going ahead and flying high where they want to be.

## What can break this glass ceiling?

The key is facing the challenges and learning to manage them by hitting the right balance. Women have a great deal to offer: they are skilled, compassionate, creative and natural multi-taskers.

Maybe we are critiqued more than our male counterparts, even by patients. They may ask, for example, when they learn their young female dentist needs to do a tooth extraction: "Doctor, will you be able to manage?" This is typical for an oral surgeon in the real world. But we need to change that and achieve our potential. Once this is done, then nothing can stop us.

## To achieve this potential, should women work more?

Women are usually hardworking by nature. But they can learn to channel the way they work. They should also learn to sell their skills. Today men may still be better heard better than women when speaking on the same platform. To change that women need to work diligently towards what they want, stay focused to achieve it and present themselves to the public to be heard and seen.

## Is there anything that the industry can do to inspire and engage female dentists?

A lot of women are less confident when it comes to regenerative and advanced den-



Prof. Ashvini Padhye in Women Regeneration Meeting hands-on course

istry. Hands-on courses and training, especially if the speakers and mentors are women, will help change this. A very good venture started by Geistlich India two years ago was the women-only events and training courses on the occasion of International Women's Day. In an all-women zone, women who might be quiet elsewhere speak up, ask questions, share experiences and gain confidence speaking on the other platforms.

## Who are the international female leaders who inspire you the most?

When we look at the Covid19 data and how countries handled the safety of their

citizens and the economic burden, we see the most successful countries were headed by women, e.g., New Zealand, Germany, Ethiopia, Finland, Iceland and Slovakia.

They were fast, objective, effective and, of course, inspiring. Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank says, "Women's role in our economy is no less than revolutionary." We need them in the work force for a better future. Being a minority might be hard, but it is also an opportunity. I tell girls: go, grab your opportunity and defy the odds. Girls with dreams become women with a vision.



Dr. Padhye taking selfie with the participants after the Women Regeneration Meeting. Mumbai, March 2020