A New Practice Gets Its Footing

For Dr. Niki Fallah, 2016 and 2017 have been the culmination of tragic loss and eventual healing and joy. It was Dr. Fallah’s father’s dream and dying wish that she establish her own practice and follow in her parents’ footsteps of business ownership. Although Dr. Fallah’s father located the eventual practice site, he passed away before ground was broken. Dr. Fallah struggled with her decision to move forward, but honoring his wishes and legacy became her driving force. In April of 2016 in Millbrae, California, Mills-Peninsula Pediatric Dentistry & Orthodontics was born.

BY LISA WELLS AND RICK DEMING | PHOTOS BY MITCHELL GOLDSTEIN AND LISA WELLS
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It is a spectacular, timeless, and inviting environment of glass, stainless steel, and curves throughout, melded with calming effects of wall murals of colorful poppies and photos of blue skies and wispy clouds on the ceiling. A plush-covered mushroom patch is in the middle of the open bay for the younger kids to sit and climb on. It is a masterful design and environment for kids of all ages.

BACKGROUND

Dr. Fallah is a San Francisco Bay Area native. Her parents founded Mills Montessori School, a 200-student school that has been in operation for decades. Dr. Fallah graduated from University of California (Berkeley) for undergrad, USC Dental School, and completed her residency in 2014 at UCSF. She also teaches at the Pediatric Department at UCSF and UOP.

Dr. Fallah grew up around dentists, including her cousin and his wife, Dr. Shawn Taheri and Dr. Roya Naderi, who completed their San Jose office in 2016 with Lisa Wells (Equipment Specialist) and Burkhart, after a fire had decimated their previous office.

MOTIVATION

“I went into dentistry to provide health care while also being able to create a balance in my life,” said Dr. Fallah. “Pediatric dentistry was a passion that evolved once I realized how important it was to develop healthy oral habits, a process that was more likely to happen when patients are younger. I felt that it was important to create a positive experience for my young patients that would stay with them into adulthood. I knew I could make a difference.”

“My dad was the catalyst for opening my practice. He made my mom promise that I would finish honoring him by opening the office—a bitter sweet process. With the passing of my father, each day was a struggle, but with the support of friends and family, I was able to realize his dream.”
Dr. Fallah was “profoundly” inspired by Dr. Dorothy Pang, a pedodontist in San Francisco. “Dorothy Pang is the gold standard of pediatric dentistry. She was one of my instructors and became my mentor. Her 30 years of experience was invaluable to me. I have the utmost respect for her and always look to her. She was a huge influence.”

Dr. Pang had recently built her stunning office, also a Burkhart project, enlisting the renowned Dental Office Project Designer Mitchell Goldstein. Dr. Fallah knew she wanted to fashion her own practice similarly to Dr. Pang’s, including the combination of ortho and pedo that Dr. Pang and husband, Dr. Peter Lee, an orthodontist, had created in their adjoining offices. They helped Dr. Fallah with her plans to ensure there was a great flow, energy, and logic to her practice. “They took the plans home and made red marks all over them, and Mitchell was already in the engineering phase. I knew Dr. Pang would only do the right thing for me—and her changes were made to the plan.”

“Dr. Pang’s office was my inspiration. This was going to be a warm and inviting space where my team would be comfortable with a staff lounge, a spacious front desk area, and their own private bathroom. And, I knew this is how I wanted to spend the rest of my career.”

Dr. Fallah chose “a team who worked extremely well together” including Mitchell Goldstein, Dental Office Project Designer (Design for Health), Eric Schmidt, Designer (Eric Schmidt Interiors), Paul Aboumrad (General Contractor), Silvio Karimi, IT Specialist (Lan Pros Communication) and Burkhart Dental (Lisa Wells, Equipment Specialist, Dave Clayner, Equipment Specialist, and Rick Deming, Account Manager). According to Dr. Fallah, “it was a collaborative process and the end result is an office that is warm, beautiful, and inviting for kids of all ages and their parents. The whole team was really great.”

According to Dr. Fallah, key players included her mom, Mitchell Goldstein, family members, Dr. Pang, and “you guys” (Burkhart). Dr. Fallah wanted to give special thanks to April Rosales (Office Manager), for helping bring her dream office into a reality; to her RDA’s (Maria, Mei, and Mona) who have been with her since the beginning, and helped set up the office; to Dr. Philip Yen for making her anesthesia cases seamless and successful; and, to her ortho team, Dr. Sona Bekmezian and Seerat Singh (RDA) for establishing and maintaining a fully functioning orthodontic practice within the office.

**TEAM**

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EQUIPMENT
Dr. Fallah visited two California Dental Association shows to narrow down her equipment choices, in conjunction with Lisa Wells and the Burkhart team. Check out the sidebar on the previous page for her specific equipment choices.

On her decision to go with a Vatech pan/ceph, Dr. Fallah stated, “I was not a follower. I made a decision that was right for me. Vatech is so user-friendly and Scott Jovich (Vatech Rep) makes himself available and is so helpful. And, the Nomad was a very good decision. The team is comfortable using it and it has worked out so well.”

INSTALLATION
Regarding the installation, Dr. Fallah said, “You guys have been awesome. Newton Fong (Lead Technician, Burkhart Dental) is great to work with and so patient. He would always call and leave me a voicemail of progress made. Every Burkhart Service Technician is very nice and very professional.”

ADVICE
When we asked Dr. Fallah if she had any advice for doctors opening their first practice, she said, “Take your time, do your homework, and be patient with the process. Make decisions slowly and in an organized way. Hire a good team, an experienced team, who has your best interest at heart. If you try and cut corners, you pay the price later.”

CONCLUSION
Since opening her practice in April, 2016, Dr. Fallah has had some incredible experiences, including her engagement to Dr. Amir Schricker, a specialized cardiologist, who lives in San Diego. Dr. Fallah’s fiancé secretly arranged for a professional paparazzi photographer to capture the marriage proposal on a park bench in Manhattan’s Central Park. A social media frenzy followed with one of the photos used as the jewelry store’s central advertising piece.

Dr. Fallah said it has been a wild year, personally and professionally—following a couple of painful years with the passing of her beloved father.

When asked what was on the horizon for her, she said, “Amir and I will have our wedding at the historic Bentley Reserve in the Financial District of San Francisco. As a tribute to her mentor, Dorothy Pang, Dr. Fallah said, ‘I hired the ‘Dr. Pang’ of wedding planners.’ And, in a spiritual sense, Dr. Fallah said of her fiancé, “My father sent him!”