



PRACTICE FACT FILE

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# How I did it

Dr Indra Rampersad explains why she took a risk and exchanged her perfect job in the Netherlands for a squat private practice in the borders area of Northumberland

I think that sometimes you have to dive into the deep and go for it, and that is exactly what I have done the past three years. If you don't try, you have lost already. Starting up from scratch seemed the only option available to me and it has worked; I believe my practice represents quality dentistry in a relaxing atmosphere.

Where I am now is down to hard work and determination to succeed. You probably think, 'What happened? Why would you set up a fully private practice from scratch in a deprived area in the north-east of England?' Well, Hendrik, my fiancé, is the key person behind all this. It is a love story really, not only love between two people or two countries, but certainly love for my profession too.



Berwick Smile  
from the outside

Indra with her team, Tamsin and Laura



**One life**

I studied dentistry at the Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. My main subjects were cosmetic and special dentistry. After graduating cum laude in 2004, I started working in a prestigious dental clinic as an associate. I thoroughly enjoyed working there and I built up my book of happy patients. I was highly appreciated, a real team player, and got cosmetic referrals; taking over this practice seemed the next step forward.

Hendrik had been living in the borders area for several years and he did not want to return to the Netherlands. We weren't seeing each other often, as there was a sea in between, and the goodbyes were becoming more and more difficult. One day, after dropping Hendrik off at the airport once again, I spotted the life-changing line on a van: 'One life, live it!' It could not be more right!

I emigrated to the north east to initially, see if this could work for me. I loved it all – being together with Hendrik, the beautiful scenery, the tranquillity and serenity. I began to apply to dental practices within commuting distance but after not

being successful for three months, I decided to do it my way and start my own practice.

**A supporting role**

Hendrik supported me in my new plans. I looked for property in Berwick-upon-Tweed, a town nearby with a demand for dentistry. We saw the potential of a former veterinary surgery that was completely ruinous. As no change of use was needed, it looked like a quick solution.

When we decided to put an offer in, there were more people interested. While doing voluntary dental work in Nepal, in November 2008, we heard our bid on the premises was accepted and were overjoyed. I spent the next few months writing a business plan, working out legislation and trying to secure funds.

Being a foreigner made it difficult to borrow the money needed to set up a practice. The recession was not helping



The waiting area has a  
homely, relaxed feel

either and the fact that I decided to go fully private straight away made most banks refuse instantly. For me though, this seemed the only way to provide quality dentistry at the standard that I was used to.

A friend brought me into contact with the Clydesdale Bank, and at last someone was willing to listen. The bank was impressed by my business plan and how I was able to find my



The dental equipment matches the colour scheme of the room



way into a new bureaucracy. Besides arranging a family loan and drawing all our personal savings, I secured grant money (PSPF and NEEIC) to pay for part of the necessary building works and equipment. This convinced the bank to offer me a loan for the other part of the refurbishment. I knew at that point that I was here to stay.

### Magic moments

The building needed to be completely stripped and refurbished. With some tips from a befriended builder, I completely designed the practice, had a local architect draw the plans and put the technical specifications in.

In March 2009, I asked different building contractors with a good local reputation to put a tender in. We chose NB Clark of Morpeth, as the company seemed most able to take on a job of this calibre. There were a lot of delays with the paper work, building regulations and the bank, giving me

unwanted extra time to revise and improve on the plans.

Building works finally started in November 2009 – one year on since our bid was accepted on the premises so, to provide for some cash flow, I started doing locums in the Netherlands. This meant I was arranging and taking care of everything concerned with the renovation in Berwick-upon-Tweed, while flying to the Netherlands almost weekly to practise dentistry. This resulted often in doing magic with appointments, flight schedules, meetings, deliveries, trains, cars and important phone calls with lots to discuss, to find out and to choose.

I combined designing a practice and being the practice's spokesperson while securing an income. In between, I built a practice website and did workshops about starting up a business. I introduced a dental care plan, arranged interest-free finance and advertising, while continuously looking for the best and most motivated staff.

In a typical week, I would have meetings on Monday morning, fly off in the afternoon, work in the Netherlands from Tuesday until Friday, and then fly back to the UK on Friday evening again. I was literally flying around, but I was learning a lot.

Of course, I did miss my family, friends and the team I left behind.

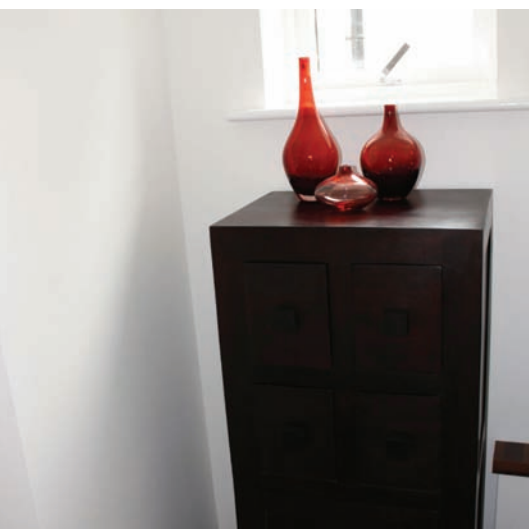


Part of the sterilisation room (dirty side)

Fortunately, Hendrik was always by my side, supportive whenever times got rough. It definitely felt like a rollercoaster ride, but in the end it was all worth it.

### Pulling it together

It was then time for the finishing touches. Cortech, an accredited fire and security company, fitted the building with cameras and alarms and made sure it was up to highest safety standards. Together with my sister and dental nurse, I decorated one wall in each room with photo wall murals



The lovely imported handcrafted solid dark mango wooden cabinet



One wall in each room is decorated with a photo wall mural imported from the Netherlands



The meeting room will become a third surgery as and when required

imported from the Netherlands. It was a lot of work, but the result is stunning and my patients really enjoy the atmosphere it brings to the rooms.

I also love the surgery cabinets (Aries) that I imported from Italy. The Dental Directory installed the new dental equipment (Kavo) in the colour scheme of the room and Clinton Compaan and his team of Dental

Dynamix Imaging installed the digital X-ray equipment (Soredex). The computer hardware and practice management software were installed by Comart. Lemonchase provided the U lights above the dental chairs and Jayne Gibson of Practice Plan has been a great help and moral support in implementing our Berwick Smile Care Plans.

### Surprises and setbacks

Turning an old redundant building into a welcoming dental practice with a homely feel was challenging. I was able to completely re-invent the small rooms that did not smell very nice (as it was a former veterinary practice), into a spacious and hygienic state-of-the-art clinic. Downstairs we have a comfortable waiting and reception area

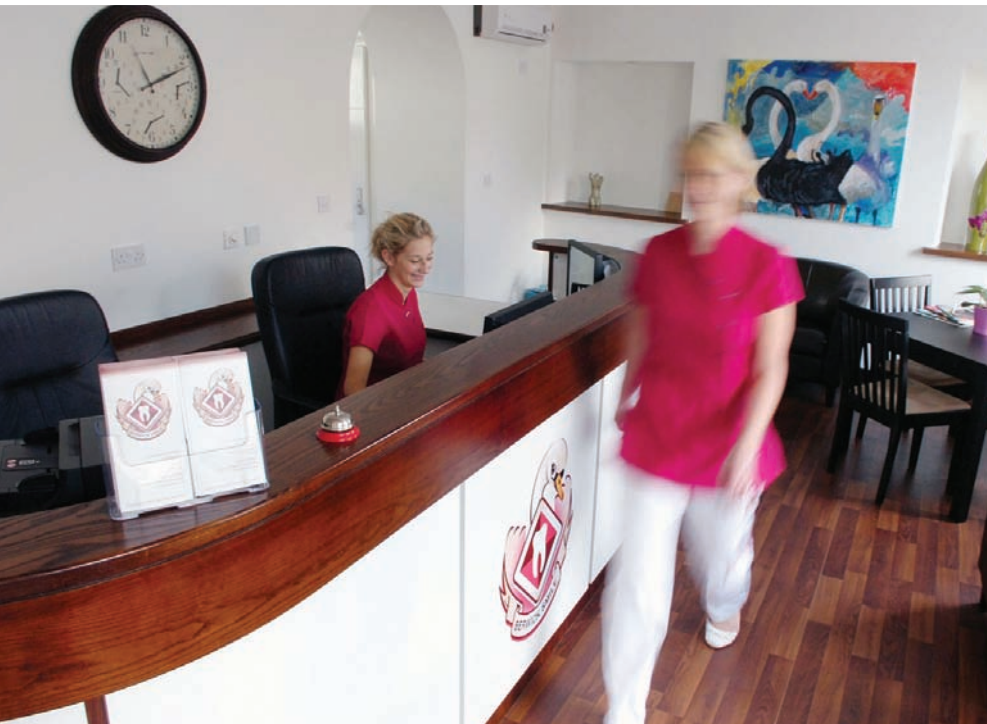


The staff changing room, represented by a butterfly

The reception area with private corner where patients can brush their teeth



Dark wood can be found all over the practice and the handrail of stairs connects it all together



with a private corner where patients can brush their teeth, a disabled toilet and a separate X-ray room.

The practice is designed to have four surgeries: think big! The two surgeries downstairs are fully kitted and have televisions above the chairs, while the floors of the two upstairs surgeries are already laid out for the extra dental chairs. My favourite one is now in use as my spacious office and the other surgery will soon house a chiropractor. Upstairs there is also the consulting room, the staff kitchen, the staff changing room, a storage room and, of course, a fully equipped sterilisation room with a washer disinfectant and a lift to transport instruments to and from the downstairs surgeries.

There were some major setbacks along the way. With the building being very old, it is difficult to predict what

you will find when you start opening everything up. Some of the ceilings, joists, rafters and floors had wood rot and some of the walls had no foundation. A survey revealed that parts of the upper floor were not even strong enough for domestic use. New double steel beams had to be implemented in the ceilings to make sure they would be able to carry the load of everyday dental work.

The sewerage under the premises became blocked by all the building rubble, and new building control instructions and extra costs kept coming in all the time.

There were also severe delays because of heavy snowfall and extreme cold weather. Even if the builders did come to the premises, it made working difficult and progress slow. When weather conditions improved, more

bad news unravelled. The gas meter revealed to be so old that the materials that were used at the time of construction were now illegal. Replacing it proved a costly and slow process.

The outside shed was discovered to be dangerous; it had rotten beams, damp walls and asbestos in the roof. All was removed and made good. In future I hope to house a laboratory there. The builders did a great job – it is amazing how well they dealt with the unexpected circumstances at all times.

A different kind of setback occurred a few months before we opened. Two big NHS practices opened in the area, taking on hundreds of new patients. This probably hindered our growth, but fortunately, patients keep finding us as we are offering a completely different service.



Even the staff room and kitchen has its own wall mural

## Raising the bar

I found a new team in two enthusiastic women – Tamsin and Laura. They alternate between working at reception and as my dental nurse. In May 2010, Berwick Smile Dental Care opened its doors. It was an exciting time. Of course, patients needed to get to know me, but everybody was very welcoming and my book of patients started to build. I even learnt to understand the local slang, mostly!

We have now been open for just over one and a half years. Even though I believe I am offering my patients the best professionalism and care available in the local area, I keep raising the bar. I want to deliver outstanding results for my patients and my practice.

I try to keep up with new developments in UK dentistry

and often follow courses to increase my skills and knowledge. Because of this, we can provide our patients with more and more cosmetic options in our own practice.

In the past, they had to drive up to 1.5 hours to visit the nearest implant dentist or to get orthodontic treatment. Now, these options are available right here in Berwick, lowering the threshold for patients to start treatments that will much improve their quality of life. I still refer work to specialists, but patients have different options now.

Regarding short-term orthodontics, I offer the Inman Aligner and also Six Month Smiles. I have attended the advanced bleaching seminar of the British Dental Bleaching Society (BDDBS) to keep up with legislation.

This year, I followed three of Dr Paul Tipton's great yearlong postgraduate training courses. After taking the implant course, we can now provide implants in our own practice. Taking these courses has me driving all around the country, but as the practice is still growing, now is the time. And of course, it is great to know that, if needed, I have the support of amazing mentors available.

I keep investing, learning, and growing – both personally and professionally. I keep striving to become even better at what we are doing for our patients, which is keeping them healthy and happy. Dentistry is my passion. You will see this reflected in my practice – no concessions, professionalism within a relaxed atmosphere. It's my vision, it's the way I work and it is why I am proud of the practice that I have created. **PD**



Indra's favourite room – the office

## COMPANIES INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

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**NB Clark (excavators)**  
T: 01670 332759  
W: [www.nbclarkmorpeth.co.uk](http://www.nbclarkmorpeth.co.uk)

**Comart**  
T: 0845 1302 999 (software)  
W: [www.comartdental.com](http://www.comartdental.com)

**Cortech (fire and security systems)**  
T: 01670 522827  
W: [www.cortechfireandsecurity.co.uk](http://www.cortechfireandsecurity.co.uk)

**Dental Directory (equipment)**  
T: 0800 585585  
W: [www.dental-directory.co.uk](http://www.dental-directory.co.uk)

**Dental Dynamix Imaging (equipment)**  
T: 0844 800 9698  
W: [www.dentaldynamiximaging.co.uk](http://www.dentaldynamiximaging.co.uk)

**LemonChase (equipment)**  
T: 01892 752305  
W: [www.lemonchase.com](http://www.lemonchase.com)

**Practiceplan (dental plans)**  
T: 01691 684120  
W: [www.practiceplan.co.uk](http://www.practiceplan.co.uk)