

CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND?

AC: I graduated from the University College Cork with a First Class honours degree and spent the next few years working in General Practices in England. Whilst working in the paediatric, oral surgery and radiology departments in Guys Hospital in London I obtained my MFDS credentials. I then started training as a specialist registrar in orthodontics at East Grinstead Hospital. In 2007 I successfully passed the MOrth examinations at the Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh. While I was training, I met my future wife Naomi at a rugby match in Cardiff and once I had finished my training I moved over to this part of the world.



WHAT OR WHO MADE YOU CHOOSE A CAREER IN ORTHODONTICS?

AC: I always had a deep interest in teeth and in my early undergraduate years we had some introductory lectures from the late Dr Seamus Keating. It was his passion and love of orthodontics that inspired me to look at the artistic side of dentistry and in particular peoples smiles. That led me to pursuing my

postgraduate studies in orthodontics.

HOW DID YOU COME TO OPEN ZEN ORTHODONTICS AND HOW DID YOU SET IT UP?

AC: Zen Orthodontics was a concept that had existed in my mind for many years. A patient-centered clinic of excellence to offer bespoke orthodontic treatment to all only became a physical reality when we opened in 2011. It

started with three staff members who had the courage and conviction in the project and all three are still with us today. They are now my practice manager and two of our orthodontics therapists. Once we found the right premises our team members worked extremely hard to create the brand and to deliver excellent customer experiences.

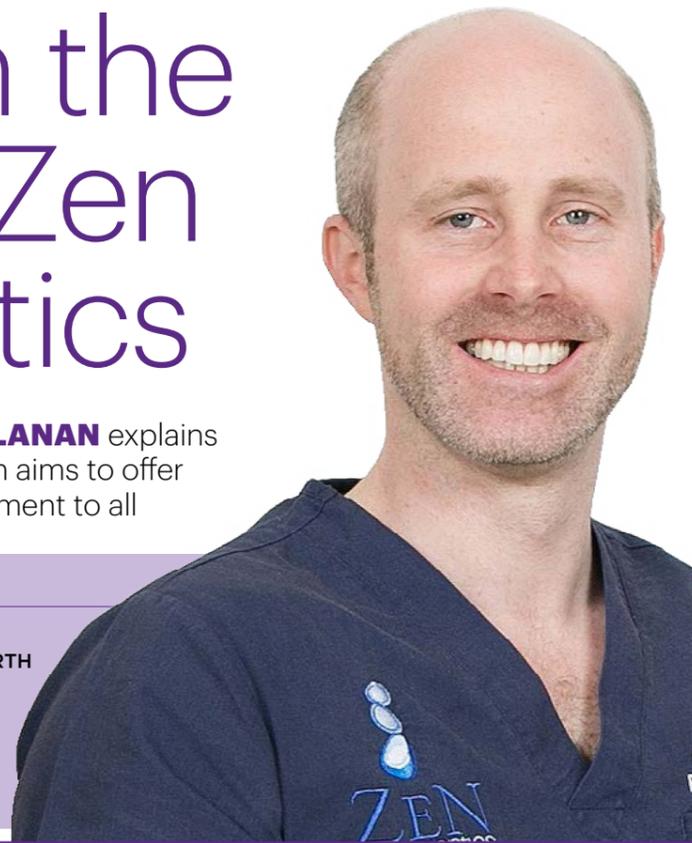
DID YOU HAVE TO OVERCOME ANY HURDLES AND/OR DIFFICULTIES?

AC: Setting up a bespoke new practice from scratch made it very challenging at the start as we were new into the market. My goal was to create unique selling points for Zen which differentiated us from our competitors. We open late nights and on Saturdays for convenience and this is hugely popular especially for patients who travel a great distance to visit us.

We also have a practice manager who takes care of all the non-clinical needs of the business and this frees up time for me to focus on clinical cases. In addition to this we also have a dedicated treatment coordinator to ensure our patients have a very smooth

Practice in the spotlight: Zen Orthodontics

Owner and practice principal **AIDAN CALLANAN** explains how he created his visionary practice which aims to offer exceptional and bespoke orthodontic treatment to all



Fact file

NAME: Aidan Callanan

QUALIFICATIONS: BDS NUI, MFDS RCPS, MSC KCL, MORTH

POSITION: Principal orthodontist/owner of Zen Orthodontics

DENTAL INTERESTS: Orthodontics

INTERESTS OUT OF DENTISTRY: Family, golf, holidays and yoga



ensure that Zen are at the forefront of the marketing world.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE SUPPORT STAFF TO YOU AND WHAT QUALITIES DID YOU LOOK FOR WHEN RECRUITING?

AC: Staff are the most important asset that we have and are the embodiment of what we do at Zen Orthodontics. Patients interact with my staff long before they get to see me, so it is vital that they emulate what Zen stands for. I look for a range of qualities in a person that I am hiring including being professional, caring and dedicated, being passionate about their jobs and being friendly and approachable.

HOW IS ZEN STRUCTURED?

AC: Working as a team is imperative at Zen. As a busy practice with multiple clinicians working simultaneously it is key that both clinical and non-clinical team members work together to ensure a smooth and enjoyable patient journey. The structure of Zen current is: clinically: Aidan – director and principal orthodontist, one associate orthodontist, three orthodontic therapists, five dental nurses. Non-clinical: practice manager, treatment

and enjoyable journey at Zen. Our treatment coordinator has a degree and background in marketing so can

HOW DO YOU THINK ORTHODONTICS HAS CHANGED SINCE YOU FIRST STARTED PRACTICING?

AC: Orthodontics is quite simple – apply a force to a tooth and it will move. However, nowadays there are multiple systems to carry this out. From fixed appliances to lingual and aligners systems the choice is much greater for the patient. I have seen a huge increase in demand for aesthetically pleasing brace systems since we opened.

WHAT LESSONS HAVE YOU LEARNED SINCE OPENING THE PRACTICE?

AC: Always think of the bigger picture. It is really important to analyse and then act – not the other way around. I have also learnt it is imperative to always put the customer first.

HOW IMPORTANT IS PATIENT COMMUNICATION TO YOU?

AC: Very! It is the cornerstone of our practice. Communication is a combination of listening and engaging with the person. All good relationships are built on this.

Most medico-legal cases arise from poor communication between the clinician and the patient. Nowadays written, verbal and digital communication

(photographs, 3D modelling, CAD/CAM) can help outline treatment plans to the patient.

DESCRIBE YOUR TYPICAL WORKING WEEK.

AC: Everyday and every week at Zen is different which I love. We start the week with a team huddle in which we can plan for the week ahead. This gives everybody a heads up on what is happening in the practice that week so that we can plan accordingly.

Typically, in a week I will be carrying out a number of different tasks from welcoming new patients to Zen in our new patient clinics, to seeing past patients for their reviews. I get to experience seeing the patient getting their braces on right through their journey to their appointment in our debond clinics. I also regularly liaise with GPs to give updates on how their patients' orthodontic treatment is going.

It is a privilege to work on somebody's smile and it is something I enjoy doing everyday.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT ALL THE CONTROVERSY IN ORTHODONTICS TODAY AND GENERAL DENTAL PRACTITIONERS PRACTICING SHORT-TERM ORTHODONTICS?

AC: I work very closely with lots of GPs and I am very proud of my working relationships with all of my dental colleagues. I don't see it as a case of orthodontists versus them when GPs provide short term orthodontics. I feel that if a clinician can answer the question, 'Is this in the patients best interest and am I competent to deliver this procedure' as per the GDC guidelines is the most



important aspect. That said, specialist orthodontic training within a teaching hospital with consultant supervision does give a deeper understanding and in depth appreciation of the complexity of treating malocclusions whilst also helping to identify and rectify any potential problems that may arise during a course of treatment. The robust training of a specialist programs helps minimise risk to patients.

HOW HAVE PATIENT EXPECTATIONS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

AC: Patient expectations are much higher today as so much information is available for them to research. From blogs to online reviews, patients have a greater knowledge and clearer picture of what they want. Brace treatment has also become more assessable to all age ranges which is fantastic. Last week we placed fixed braces on a 68-year-old. We see lots of adult cases attending who haven't had brace treatment before. We are also now working in conjunction with a lot more dentists on multi-disciplinary cases.

HOW DO YOU STAY ABREAST OF MODERN TECHNIQUES?

AC: Ensuring Zen Orthodontics is at the forefront of using modern techniques

is key to us. Going online can provide a great source of information on what is happening as can CPD courses and non-clinical courses for our administrative staff. Attendance at seminars on specific topics such as Invisalign are important to empower our team with the skills to always look at improving our patient journey. I personally also really enjoy reading industry magazines and journals.

PROFESSIONALLY, WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

AC: The development of the team and seeing people fulfil their potential.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR MOTIVATION AND DRIVE FROM?

AC: I have always been determined and focused and this is something that I get from my parents who had the philosophy that if you want it, you work for it. This has kept me in good stead so far. My wife, Naomi who is not in the dental profession is a fantastic support to me. She gives me an honest non-dental perspective which is invaluable.

HOW DO YOU RELAX IN YOUR SPARE TIME? HOW DO YOU BALANCE WORK AND FAMILY LIFE?

AC: Zen Orthodontics is now five years old and I also have three children under five so finding time to relax is really important. I am a member of the local golf club and try to play as often as I can. For mindfulness and mental relaxation I have recently taken up yoga which I am really enjoying. I also love to spend quality time with my wife and children which helps me switch off and focus on my family life.

DO YOU HAVE ANY REGRETS?

AC: Thankfully not, I am very grateful for my life to date and worrying about things is not something that I do. Nobody is perfect, mistakes will happen and it is how you deal with them that defines your success. Regret can lead to negativity which is best avoided.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

AC: I am looking forward to continuing to progress and enhance Zen Orthodontics to new heights. Whether that be with the addition of new team members or new treatments, I still have the passion and determination to grow and develop all aspects of the business. My job doesn't feel like work at all and that's what I want the future to be as well. 

