

Leading by example

University of Alberta faculty member Dr. Humam Saltaji hopes to encourage more Canadian orthodontists to become board certified

When Dr. Humam “Hugh” Saltaji of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, began the combined PhD-orthodontic residency program at the University of Alberta, he set a goal of becoming board certified by The American Board of Orthodontics (ABO). As a clinical assistant professor at the University of Alberta, he now hopes to encourage a new generation of Canadian orthodontists to follow his example.

To practice orthodontics in Canada, orthodontists must successfully complete the National Dental Specialty Examination (NDSE), which is administered by the Royal College of Dentists of Canada (RCDC). While some of his Canadian colleagues might view ABO board certification as an extra, unnecessary step, Dr. Saltaji does not, and he hopes to change this mindset.

“To me, becoming a board-certified orthodontist demonstrates that I was involved in additional examinations and an ongoing peer-review process of my training and my experience in order to measure my competency in implementing what I have learned throughout my orthodontic residency program,” he said. “I believe that I am now better in appraising, evaluating, and planning the treatment of orthodontic cases because of this experience. I am also now committed to continually growing my knowledge and becoming a lifelong learner, following the highest ethical and practice standards and engaging in critical self-evaluation, professional development and learning opportunities to enrich my clinical competency.”

Dr. Saltaji, who is setting out to be a clinician scientist who integrates research with clinical practice, completed the written and oral components of the NDSE in March and June 2015. He then successfully completed the ABO Clinical Examination in February 2016. When preparing for the ABO Clinical Examination, he relied on Dr. Carlos Flores-Mir, director of the University of Alberta graduate orthodontic program, for logistical support.

Going forward, Dr. Saltaji would like to see the Canadian graduate orthodontic programs more fully incorporate the ABO standards and examinations into the curriculum.

“Having completed examinations for both the Royal College of Dentists of Canada (RCDC) and The American Board of Orthodontics, I can say that the two examinations complement each other in increasing an orthodontist’s knowledge and confirming his or her clinical competency,” he said. “Thus, there is a clear need for more efficient steps and ways from the current six orthodontic graduate programs in Canada to implement ABO examinations as part of their programs’ agenda, as well as identifying specific mechanisms for encouraging Canadian orthodontists to take

the ABO examinations. Examples of these steps that could be taken are: providing the framework early on to identify potential board-eligible cases, offering sessions that review ABO orthodontic cases, and reimbursing graduate students for the examination fees.”

Through his position at the university, Dr. Saltaji says he will be committed to providing orthodontic residents with information about the certification and preparation processes. He has already found that the students are highly interested. “For 2017, all five of the graduating University of Alberta residents will challenge the ABO examinations,” he said. “I believe that attendance at seminars and one-on-one instruction during the preparation process is valuable. I will also encourage the preparation of seminar sessions to review ABO cases.

“I strongly encourage Canadian orthodontists to take the ABO examinations to enrich their clinical competence and prove their continuous commitment to excellence.”