

BSPD Inaugural Presidential address

President! I can't believe it.

The last couple of years have been tough on all of us and I am so grateful to be here today to speak to you all.

I would like to start by saying a huge thank you to Sarah Mckaig, on behalf of myself and BSPD, for her compassionate and inclusive leadership during her time as president. We are all so appreciative that you agreed to lead the society for an extra year during what has been an incredibly difficult and uncertain time and we wish you all the best in your future endeavours (pause).

It is also my pleasure to thank Caroline Holland for the dedication that she has shown the society over the years and for all the work she has done to help raise awareness for the society and put us on the political map, allowing us to advocate for child oral health. We are sad to see you go and you will be missed.

It's tradition for the new president to talk about their journey and what led them to this prestigious position, so I will use this time to pay homage to those who helped me along the way and do my best to keep it interesting.

I grew up in Iraq and as a young girl I witnessed two wars before I had even reached adulthood. I spent my teenage years not knowing if my family and I would make it from one day to the next. Looking back, I can now see the resilience that I had no choice but to acquire from the situation, which I carry with me to this day. Despite the chaotic and unsettling environment, one thing that my parents made sure to instil in me was the importance of education; both of my parents were academics, so you can see where I get it from!

At 17 years old my dad made the brave albeit daunting decision to flee the war and move my family to Jordan where I went on to study dentistry. It was certainly not easy, having to build new bonds with people while worrying about the family and friends that

we had left behind. But I am very grateful to my dad for pushing the move and my mum who gave up her job at the university in Iraq knowing that there were no vacancies in her specialist area of in Jordan at the time. Their sacrifices are why I am here today.

It was in Jordan where I first fell in love with paediatric dentistry after starting clinical work on the children's clinic. With no access to general anaesthesia, we relied on what I can now only put down to pure luck and magic to help us complete treatments. All jokes aside, I really enjoyed the challenge, and it was then that I discovered my passion for working with children. I was also lucky enough to meet my lifelong teammate and husband, Fadi.

In 1998, around the time Fadi and I got married and I was due to start my PhD, I sadly lost my father very suddenly. Looking back I can see that losing him made me even more determined to pursue higher education and a successful academic career. I knew he wouldn't want me to put my life on hold, I had to be brave and, despite the heart-breaking loss, I pushed on.

A week later, Fadi and I arrived in Belfast and I started my PhD at Queens University. The Irish seemed very welcoming - however I can't be too sure because at the time I had no idea what they were saying! It took me over 6 months to get round the accent and slang, I still don't know why 'wee' means small.

During this time, I fell pregnant with my daughter, Hadeel, who I gave birth to mid PhD, thank goodness for affordable university childcare! I will never forget the sleepless nights I had leading up to revealing my pregnancy to my PhD supervisor Professor Martin Kinirons, as I was only four months into my PhD. Luckily Martin was very supportive despite the different times. However, I did insist that I work until the day I went into labour as, luckily, the school of dentistry was across the road from the maternity hospital. Two years later, I started my clinical training, I moved to Sheffield and then Dublin, and finally settled here in Liverpool in 2002.

The next big change happened after my son David was born in 2003. I started my specialist training in Manchester where I worked closely with Professor Ian Mackie, he

introduced flexible training before it was even a thing, allowing me to balance work and home life despite the trip I had to make across the M62 daily. I worked full time in Manchester, but I was lucky enough to have one study day that allowed me to work from home. So 4 days a week I would commute and Fadi would do the nursery and school runs before and after work. I wasn't sure who had it easier but I'm now sure it was me!

At this point I would like to take a moment to thank Fadi, the perfect companion on my journey, we have always worked as a team and figured out what step to take next and when, ensuring that both of our careers moved forward without either of us ever having to take a step back for the other while always putting the children 1st. This is how we both made it to professor with only a year between us – Fadi did beat me to it, but I became a consultant first..... not that we're counting! I am so grateful for you; I couldn't have done it without you.

I did my NHS training in Manchester but still managed to be involved in research, allowing me to move to an academic post CCST training position at Liverpool in 2008. I also want to take a moment to thank the team in Liverpool, without you I would not be here today. When I moved to Liverpool, I joined what was a very small paediatric dentistry team, but look at us now! We are thriving and growing, and I am so proud to be a member of such a wonderful team. This growth can only be attributed to all of you, so thank you for your hard work and support and for making my job a pleasure.

Over the years of my academic career, there have been a lot of investments and changes made to the academic training pathways, including, but not limited to, the introduction of less than full time training and fairer recruitment systems. However, in my opinion the pathways remain rigid and prescriptive. I believe that we really need to ensure that there are multiple pathways made available and accessible to encourage women, in particular, to undertake and invest in an academic career without feeling as though they are having to make huge personal sacrifices. This will be one of my focuses this year as president.

That being said, despite still having some ways to go to promote equality in opportunities within and beyond dentistry, there is no denying that we have come a long way. I am proud to be the first female president from an ethnic minority and I intend to engage with the membership to gauge the level of diversity in the society and work to further it.

There is no doubt that we have a difficult year ahead of us. We face widening inequalities, growing waiting lists, difficulties in primary care and access and new working environments while, in the meantime, teams get used to the new normal. I promise to do my best to make these issues a priority during my term as president and ensure BSPD's voice is heard.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for joining the AGM, it has been an honour speaking to you. See you at the quiz later for some light-hearted fun.