

Attaining Certification Mid-Career Is Achievable

ABO tools, mentorship help New Jersey orthodontist complete Clinical Examination

Dr. Michael Perillo of Hasbrouck Heights, N.J., had always intended to become certified by The American Board of Orthodontics (ABO), but after 20 years in practice had yet not completed the process.

He passed the ABO Written Examination in 1995 right after finishing his orthodontic residency at the University of Pennsylvania. But then other priorities intervened. With the rigors of starting and growing a practice, raising a family and later holding a part-time faculty position at the University of Pennsylvania, preparing for the Clinical Examination seemed like too much to take on.

Now, Dr. Perillo advises other orthodontists in early and mid-career that, yes, the goal of certification is possible while also balancing work, family and other personal roles. He completed his Clinical Examination in February 2017.

“It’s not as intimidating as it seems from the outside,” Dr. Perillo said of the Clinical Examination. “The examination process was great. The examiners were more like facilitators than examiners. They provided me with some insights on my cases that I continue to find useful in practice.”

Dr. Perillo added, “Since then, I’ve made an effort to speak with colleagues who graduated around the same time as me, and who passed the Written Examination but not the Clinical Examination. I strongly encourage them to consider the Clinical Examination and start compiling their cases.”

A strong influence for Dr. Perillo both past and present has been his mentors at the University of Pennsylvania orthodontic program. These include the late Dr. Robert Vanarsdall, Jr., who served as chair of the Department of Orthodontics for over 25 years, and the current department chair, Dr. Chun-Hsi Chung, who also is ABO president.

“I thank Dr. Vanarsdall for encouraging me to get the certification process started back when I was in residency. More recently, I am most grateful to Dr. Chung for helping to mentor and guide me through completing the Clinical Examination,” Dr. Perillo said. He also found the materials on the ABO website helpful in selecting and preparing cases.

Holding ABO certification benefits Dr. Perillo in his faculty role at Penn Dental, where he is pre-doctoral director of orthodontics. He oversees the orthodontic curriculum given to dental students, and is on the post-doctoral admissions committee.

“Dr. Vanarsdall and now Dr. Chung always have been very strong proponents of the ABO and have made it an integral part of the residency program. So it’s fitting that I now carry this certification,” Dr. Perillo said.

Dr. Chung said, “As the Penn Orthodontic department chair, I am very happy that Dr. Perillo, a Penn alumnus and long-time faculty member, has become board certified. At Penn, we strongly encourage residents, alumni, and faculty to obtain board certification. We believe that board certification is beneficial to patients and important for our profession.”

He continued, “Dr. Perillo’s board certification can be inspiring to other non-certified experienced practicing orthodontists. He has demonstrated that with a busy schedule of practice and life, board certification is still do-able. More importantly, the certification is a life-long process of self-improvement and learning; ultimately the standard of patient care is elevated.”

Dr. Perillo commented that the Clinical Examination was a learning process that has benefited him in his practice. “It has definitely given me a more detailed approach to cross-checking and fine-tuning cases. I gained a different perspective. It also has given me more confidence in my ability as an orthodontist.”

He also expects that as time goes on, certification will be an advantage for him with referring dentists.

Hometown Practice

Dr. Perillo describes his practice in Hasbrouck Heights as “kind of a hometown, Main Street practice.” While located just 30 minutes from Manhattan, Hasbrouck Heights maintains a small-town feel, and indeed his office is located just two blocks down the main street from the borough hall.

“Many of my patients’ families commute to New York City,” he noted. With the close-knit sense of community, Dr. Perillo says most of his patients come from word-of-mouth referrals.

He typically spends three days a week in his practice, and the other two days at the Penn Dental orthodontic program in Philadelphia, a two-hour commute.

Dr. Perillo, his family and staff are active in the local community. In February 2017, they joined in the local polar plunge and raised \$5,000 for the Special Olympics. Dr. Perillo also conducts annual dental screenings at Corpus Christi School in Hasbrouck Heights and is active in the adjoining Corpus Christi Church. He is a member of the Hasbrouck Heights Lions Club. He and his wife have four children.

“As a practitioner and prominent member of the community, it is necessary to give back. To be a professional is to be a leader and to be involved,” Dr. Perillo said.