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Dr. Chinn currently holds a full-time faculty position. He works three days a week with pre-doctoral candidates, pediatric dental residents, and post-doctoral fellows. His other two days are spent in clinical practice. Dr. Chinn's primary interests are in community-based research, oral health services and promotion to underserved populations, such as Head Start and WIC. Watch this video to learn more about how Dr. Chinn started teaching dentistry.

Video Transcript

DR. COURTNEY CHINN: To be completely honest, I think I fell backwards into dental academics. I think I was exploring. I was relatively early in my career. I'd been out, after residency, maybe only about three or three and a half years. When I first thought of dental academics, I thought it was just, Well, isn't that just looking over preps? Working with students, to make sure they did a dental procedure correctly? Now I realize that there is so much more to dental academics than just supervising clinic. I realize that, as we mature and grow in our careers, our interests change, our passions change. We become different types of providers, different types of professionals, and areas like research, areas like academics suddenly can allow us to work and achieve goals that we wouldn't be able to do as a clinician. As a dental academic, you can pull levers, you can make changes, influence others, future dental workforce for example, in ways that are exponentially greater than anything I could do as a single provider.

I think, when it comes to challenges, to entering academic careers, the first part is, I just don't know where to start. I found, just by trial and error, unfortunately, just having conversations with trusted individuals, people who are actually dental careers, have a cup of coffee with them. I realized that I related with a lot of things they were saying. We had very similar goals and desires of what to do with our careers.

Well, I think one of the most common challenges to an academic career is the difference in income. Oh, my gosh. I hear that all the time. I'm not going to deny it. I think it's basically the truth. I think in private practice you can potentially do a lot better than you would in a career in dental academics. I've heard the argument about loans, on both sides of the coin. But at the end of the day, I've made peace with really knowing what my potential income is going to be, compared to some of my peers and colleagues. What you really want to do is have a career that you're really interested in. Not to say that I'm not interested in a clinical career. I love patient care. But at the end of the day, dental academics allows me certain opportunities. It allows me certain pathways that a purely clinical career can't. With that, I'm willing to maybe take a concession with the income, in order to wake up and do programs, be engaged with students every day, and I think that more than makes up for it.

If practice is getting a little stale, if things seem monotonous, why not change it up? Why not continually have that curiosity we had ten years ago? So I really encourage them to – if they're just thinking about it, it's a great field. It's a great place of opportunity, and you don't necessarily have to give up everything in clinical practice. I'm able to balance both an academic career and still work clinically.

I teach dentistry because it allows me to broaden the horizons of the future dental workforce, dental students, to think more about what their careers can fully, potentially be. More than just clinical practice, but improving oral health of underserved populations, improving dental education and improving research.