

‘A labour of love’

Dentist **Aisha Shabir** shares her journey of building a practice from the ground up, transforming an empty field into a nature-inspired clinic

Aisha Shabir isn't the first dentist to juggle pregnancy and launching a squat practice, and she won't be the last. Managing the overlap of these two milestones is not without some extra stress. Starting a business and managing its growth always demands formidable resilience – even more significant when balancing the demands of pregnancy and entrepreneurship, making the journey uniquely challenging.

As reported by [dentistry.co.uk](https://www.dentistry.co.uk), research from Instant Offices shows that only 11% of dental practices launched in 2022 were started by women. Sadly, this marked a decline from the previous year, when women established 287 out of 1,365 new practices, accounting for 21%.

As a business entrepreneur who launched her squat practice earlier this year, Aisha is one of the few women for whom this is a lived experience. She navigated the challenges with steely determination, all while expecting her third child.

Now the proud owner of Everysmile Dental Clinic in Ratby, Leicester, it has been an incredible journey. It began in May 2018 when her father-in-law, a GP with a vision for a multi-health centre comprising a GP surgery, pharmacy and dental practice, purchased a plot of land for his project. Back then, it was just an empty field.

PURE PASSION

Reflecting on the transformation from those early construction days to the clinic's opening, Aisha fondly recalls: 'Everysmile is a real labour of love built

with pure passion from the foundations up. My father-in-law, a GP, purchased the land for the practice in 2018, and it was just minutes away from the old GP practice.

'Planning permission for the super surgery took time, but by May 2022, the builder was on site, and by October 2023, the GP practice was opened. I received the keys to start my dental fit-out in October 2023, which was completed in February 2024. After an eventual and long-awaited CQC inspection, we officially opened in March.'

Two of the practice's surgeries are operational, and as the practice grows, plans are in place to expand and fit out the remaining two. But this could be sooner than first anticipated.

Aisha explains: 'This is the first dental practice in the village, so we leveraged the GP practice's footfall and used a banner with a QR code to attract patients, resulting in 250–300 people who registered their interest. We operate five days a week, with extended hours on Mondays and Wednesdays until 8pm to accommodate different schedules.'





SOLID SUPPORT

Balancing the business's demands with family life is challenging, especially with three children under five. However, she is determined to make it work and is thankful for the support from her GP husband, Asim, and her in-law family.

'Ultimately, responsibility for Everysmile lies with me, which can be challenging. I became pregnant with my third child mid-build, which added to this. Thankfully, I had a project manager, so I avoided the typical building problems. However, I did face a difficult time due to a prolonged wait for a CQC inspection, which delayed opening.

'I had bills to pay without the prospect of seeing patients, and it was hard. I also had an associate position to complete, seeing patients through to the end of their treatment, so it's been hectic.

'There are times when you wonder if being a business owner is worth it, and a nine-to-five alternative has its appeal. Finding your purpose in life and getting your mojo back can be challenging, especially when dealing with the unique struggles of being a woman practice owner – struggles that often differ from those of practice-owning couples, for example.

'I've never been through this experience before, but you find a way to make it work because you don't know any different.'

DESIGNED FOR DENTISTRY

Everysmile provides a full range of dental services, from Invisalign and veneers to implants, with a special focus on sedation-led treatments. The practice accepts referrals for these services,

which are managed by Aisha, a skilled sedationist dedicated to alleviating dental anxiety and creating a more comfortable experience for patients.

'Everysmile is built on the mission of creating a comfortable and welcoming environment, breaking down the barriers of dental phobia and ensuring every patient feels cared for. We emphasise a relaxed atmosphere, akin to a spa, which is reflected in our patient reviews. Unlike typical dental visits or surgeries, we prioritise comfort through sensory engagement – using sight, sound and smell to ease our patients.

'We provide specialised referrals for children who need gas and air sedation and offer sedation for various procedures, including extractions and fillings, even for children as young as four.

'One of our core services is managing patients with dental anxiety – around 60–70% of our clientele fall into this category. We use behaviour management therapy and slow dentistry, breaking down treatments into manageable segments to ensure a stress-free experience.

'For those needing multiple extractions or implants, we offer comprehensive care that minimises discomfort and often results in amnesia of the procedure, ensuring a positive experience. Referrals are easy; practitioners can upload X-rays directly. This convenience is a key part of our unique service offering.'

And Everysmile's interior has been thoughtfully designed to support the practice's focus on nervous patients.

Aisha explains: 'Our design concept embraces the five senses, with a special emphasis on colour schemes inspired by nature. This theme is reflected in the names of our four surgeries – oak, maple, willow and aspen. I was particularly eager to include a curved wall, as its gentle, inviting curve evokes a calming atmosphere similar to that of a hotel lobby. We chose a distressed concrete-effect wallpaper to enhance this sense of a hospitality setting.

'I eventually brought in Gloss Interiors, and its designers worked closely with Elliot, our builder. I initially leaned towards neutral tones and gold accents. However, adding green velvet and other natural elements created a refreshing and grounded space. This theme is echoed in the green-coloured equipment and carefully selected furniture.'

This is also reflected in the surgeries where she has installed Belmont chairs.

'I have used Belmont chairs in other practices and liked their simplicity. It's a well-known brand, and I have worked on the Compass and Voyager models. I have two Voyagers in the luxury pearlised upholstery and get compliments from patients for their aesthetics and comfort. The Eurus was launched just after I bought them, so I will be looking to upgrade when we open the next two surgeries.'

SPEAK UP

So, what advice would she offer colleagues looking to launch their own practice?

'You're pretty clueless until you go through the process yourself. But I'm never afraid to speak up if something doesn't sit right with me, and this approach has consistently served me well.

'Opening a new private clinic in a new area can sometimes carry a stigma, so it's important to actively engage with new patients to build rapport and establish trust. We scan every new patient; this is an invaluable tool to educate them about issues they may not previously have been aware of. When patients see the results themselves, it enhances their understanding.

'Lastly, professional and personal support is essential throughout the entire journey. I've been fortunate to receive help from many people along the way, for which I am deeply grateful.'