

Foreign-trained doctors open 'dream' clinic

Immigrants journey from pumping gas to receiving their degrees a second time

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Oleg and Olena Klipitch's Canadian dream grew from a prophecy during a highway drive.

"I just felt, 'We're going to have our own (medical-dental) office. We'll name it Dr. O.K.' That was so long ago. But I still get goosebumps," recalled Olena.

Last August, the Ukrainian-born couple's dream became reality when they opened Dr. O.K. Medical Centre on The Queensway at Kipling Avenue. In their native Ukraine, Oleg was a medical doctor, Olena a dentist.

A decade after their immigration to Canada, both are now licensed to practise their professions in Ontario.

Three family physicians, three dentists, hygienists, physiotherapists and a pharmacist work at what Oleg calls their "multidisciplinary, multicultural" clinic. All three business partners are Egyptian. One doctor hails from Albania. A physiotherapist is Polish.

"We want to show new immigrants that anything is possible in Canada if you work hard, believe in yourself, concentrate on achieving your goal and have some luck in meeting people who sincerely support you," said Oleg.

Last Wednesday, Peterborough MPP Jeff Leal visited the Klipitchs' bright, spacious, shiny-new medical-dental centre.

Nearly a decade ago, Leal encouraged Oleg to return to practising medicine. The men met while Oleg was pumping gas into Leal's car at the NOCO Gas Station in Peterborough, which Oleg later came to own.

A fast chat led to a meeting. Leal offered advice, support and wrote reference letters to bolster Oleg's McMaster University medical school application.

"This is an amazing story," Leal said of the Klipitchs. "You often

have to clear a path through the bureaucratic jungle (of accreditation for foreign-trained professionals). This is the poster child for how it can work, and for how multidisciplinary health care should be looked at across Canada."

Yet the road to accreditation for foreign-trained doctors and dentists in Canada is steep, long and often winding.

"Getting into residency in Canada can be difficult," said Dr. Arta Bedaj, a family physician from Albania who paid to write her exams in Canada then applied for residency.

She is one of three doctors at the clinic.

"The number of spots is controlled by the government. As difficult as it is for Canadians to get into medical school, it's more difficult for us to get into residency."

The provincial government reported supporting foreign-trained doctors is part of its strategy to address Ontario's shortage of approximately 2,000 physicians. Each year, the province dedicates more than 200 residency spaces for foreign-trained physicians through a program called the Canadian

Resident Matching Service.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario reported it is approving more Internationally trained Medical Graduates (IMGs) than ever. Licence issuance to IMGs increased by 119 per cent over the past decade. In 2009, IMGs received 42 per cent of licences

issued by the college.

Becoming a licensed physician or dentist in Ontario is often an immense challenge that can inspire feelings of exasperation and frustration. But the Klipitchs never lost faith in their dream.

"I delivered pizza, pumped gas, worked construction, you name it. I did it in my life. It's nothing to be ashamed of. It's a challenge in your life," said Oleg.

Oleg worked long hours, even



Staff photo/ MARY GAUDET

LONG JOURNEY: Husband and wife Dr. Oleg Klipitch, M.D. and Dr. Olena Klipitch, D.D.S, returned to school after immigrating to Canada from Ukraine, earning their respective degrees for the second time before opening their new clinic.

commuting daily from the family's home in Etobicoke to the gas station in Peterborough. In 2002, Olena gained one of only 12 coveted spots that year in the qualifying program for foreign-trained dentists at the University of Western Ontario in London.

In 2004, Olena earned her doctor of dental surgery degree.

Within a month of her graduation, the couple was expecting their second child and an 'ecstatic' Oleg received his acceptance letter from McMaster University medical school in Hamilton, Ont.

Olena worked two jobs at dental offices in Etobicoke while Oleg commuted daily to Hamilton for four years of medical training for the

second time in his life.

At medical school, he was the oldest in his class, twice the age of most students. In 2009, Oleg graduated from McMaster University's family medicine residency program. Nearly 15 years after their arrival in Canada, the Klipitchs' dream clinic is open and accepting new patients.

'We want to show new immigrants that anything is possible in Canada if you work hard, believe in yourself, concentrate on achieving your goal.'

— Oleg Klipitch



TROPICAL TUNES AT BLOORDALE

CARIBBEAN THEMES: The Napanima Alumni Association of Canada "Panache" Steelband is busy rehearsing for the Tropical Steelband Night being held at Bloordale United Church, 4258 Bloor St. W. on Saturday, May 14 at 7:30 p.m. Members include, from left, Portia Barrieffe, Rustin Oree, Shirley Zanchetta, Michele Comeau, Ian Ramdial and Vanessa Ramsahai. Call 416-358-4504 for tickets.

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