



A Reason to Smile

Conversation with a CEO: Nuffield Holdings Founder,
Chairman and Director Dr Samintharaj Kumar

A distinguished figure in the fields of dentistry and medicine in Singapore, Dr Samintharaj Kumar has contributed significantly to local healthcare through his multifaceted expertise and dedication to holistic patient care. With a foundational degree in Dentistry and an MBBS from London, his academic and professional journey is one that has been marked by excellence as well as an unwavering commitment to provide the best medical care to his patients.

As the Founder, Chairman and Director of Nuffield Holdings, Dr Kumar has helped to revolutionise healthcare delivery in Singapore through a multi-disciplinary approach encompassing Dentistry, Medicine and Surgical Specialties in the field of ENT (Ear, Nose & Throat), and Wellness. Nuffield Holdings, under his visionary leadership, offers a comprehensive suite of patient care over a number of different disciplines. For this Prime Interview, Dr Kumar shares with us insights into his extensive training, his career journey, his experiences with Nuffield, as well as his perspectives on health and wellness.



Good morning, Dr Kumar. Thank you for taking time out from your busy schedule to talk to us. Let's get straight to the interview, shall we? Can you share with us the journey that took you into dentistry? What then led you to pursue further medical training?

Dr Saminthaaraj Kumar: Good morning to you as well! It's a pleasure to speak with Prime. Now, onto your question. When I was 13 years old, I once happened to observe children with unique and curious head shapes at KK (Kandang Kerbau) Hospital while I was in the hospital lift. This incident fascinated me and sparked a deep interest in pursuing a career where I could help to treat such patients. Craniofacial surgery would become my initial focus in healthcare.

My journey to becoming a dentist was challenging. Initially, I didn't get the grades to enter medical school and my attempts to interview for medical school in the UK were unsuccessful. Looking back, I realised that my playful attitude in school and lack of clear direction contributed to these setbacks. But I persevered as I had wanted to become a doctor since young.

While I didn't get into medical school, I did secure a place in NUS's (National University of Singapore) dental school. Initially, I had concerns about my manual dexterity, but I soon realised that my hand-to-eye coordination was pretty good and I am very well-suited to being a dentist.

In my third year of dental school, I met Professor Malcolm Harris, a maxillofacial surgeon from England. His astuteness in diagnosing patients and his career path greatly inspired me. His inspirational nature led me to pursue medicine as a second degree, with the goal of a career in oral and maxillofacial surgery, and a later subspecialty in craniofacial and cleft surgery.

What areas of dentistry and medicine are you most passionate about?

SK: While I used to be incredibly passionate about craniofacial surgery, my interests now lie in dental implantology, dento-facial aesthetics, TMJ (temporomandibular joint) pain management, and holistic dentistry. These areas allow me to combine my skills and knowledge from both dentistry and medicine to make a significant impact on patients' lives. The intricate nature of these procedures fascinates me as they require a deep understanding of both dental and medical principles to achieve optimal outcomes.

My medical training and dental background constantly inform and influence each other, enriching my approach to patient care. My dental expertise provides a strong foundation in oral health and maxillofacial anatomy, which is crucial for performing complex surgeries. Conversely, my medical training broadens my perspective on systemic health, enabling me to consider the overall well-being of my patients when planning and executing dental treatments.

What are some memorable cases you had handled?

SK: One of the most memorable cases in my career involved a 45-year-old female patient who had suffered from severe TMJ pain for many years. This condition had significantly affected her quality of life, causing chronic pain, difficulty in eating, and severe headaches. She had seen numerous specialists over the years, but sadly found little relief.

When she came to my practice, I conducted a thorough assessment, taking into account her medical history, previous treatments and current symptoms. She was also a renal transplant recipient with a history of vitamin D deficiency

and osteoporosis, and was on multiple medications with fluid restrictions. Additionally, she had severe allergies to materials used in traditional dental treatments, such as root canal treated teeth and metal fillings. Given her complex medical background and dental needs, I developed a comprehensive treatment plan that included the use of ceramic dental implants to address her allergies. She required a full upper dental implant-supported bridge. The challenge was further compounded by the need to restore her facial aesthetics, as she had lost a significant amount of bone in the anterior jaw, making her smile difficult to recreate.

The treatment plan began with initial dental adjustments to prepare for the implant placement. This included removing any remaining metal fillings and root canal treated teeth to eliminate allergens, and reduce inflammation. We then moved on to the implant placement phase, using advanced 3D imaging technology to meticulously plan the positioning of the ceramic dental implants. These implants were chosen specifically for their biocompatibility, reducing the risk of allergic reactions.

Due to the significant bone loss in her anterior jaw, bone grafting procedures were performed to rebuild the bone structure. This step was crucial to provide a solid foundation for the implants and to restore her facial aesthetics. Remarkably, the upper implants were placed on the same day, giving her the benefit of the All-on-4/Teeth-in-a-Day procedure. This immediate placement allowed her to leave the clinic with a fully functional and aesthetically pleasing set of teeth, significantly enhancing her quality of life.

Alongside the dental treatments, a customised oral appliance was created to relieve the pressure on her TMJ, combined with physiotherapy sessions to alleviate her chronic pain.

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Over several months, we closely monitored her progress, adjusting the treatment plan as needed. This included addressing her fluid restrictions and managing her multiple medications to ensure her overall health was maintained throughout the process.

Despite the complexities, the treatment was a success. Gradually, her TMJ pain diminished, and she regained the ability to eat and speak without discomfort. The full upper dental implant-supported bridge not only restored her smile but also significantly improved her facial aesthetics, giving her confidence and improving her quality of life.



This case stands out to me because it exemplifies the importance of a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to patient care. By leveraging my expertise in both dentistry and medicine, I was able to provide a treatment plan that addressed her multiple health concerns comprehensively.

Let's switch topics and talk about Nuffield Holdings. What motivated you to start Nuffield Holdings? What then motivated you to diversify vertically to other branches of healthcare?

SK: I started Nuffield Holdings from a desire to create a healthcare organisation that combines both medical and dental expertise to provide comprehensive patient care. My background in both fields allowed me to understand the need for an integrated approach, ensuring patients receive holistic treatments that address all aspects of their health.

The decision to vertically diversify into other branches of healthcare was driven by the aim to offer a broader range of services, enhancing the continuity of care and meeting diverse patient needs within a single organisation. My vision for Nuffield is to continue expanding our services while maintaining the highest standards of care, ultimately becoming a leading healthcare provider known for innovation, excellence and patient-centred care.

You spoke about expanding your services. Are there any new areas Nuffield is moving into?

SK: In addition to our core medical and dental services, we have expanded our offerings to include Nuffield Counselling, which provides mental health support and therapy. This service is crucial in addressing the mental and emotional well-being of our patients, recognising that mental health is an integral part of overall health. Our counsellors work closely with patients to help them navigate life's challenges, offering support for issues such as stress, anxiety and depression.

We have also introduced Nuffield Nutrition, which focuses on functional nutrition. This service emphasises the use of food as medicine, creating personalised nutrition plans that address specific health concerns and promote optimal wellness. By understanding the unique nutritional needs of each patient, we can provide tailored advice and interventions that support their overall health and well-being.

Furthermore, we have added Nuffield Ayurvedic Wellness to our portfolio. Nuffield Ayurvedic Wellness offers traditional Indian medicine practices akin to TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine). This holistic approach includes treatments and therapies that balance the body, mind and spirit, promoting natural healing and preventive care. Our ayurvedic wellness services offer alternative and complementary treatments that enhance the overall healthcare experience for our patients.

One thing that people commonly neglect is obstructive sleep apnea. This condition can lead to various health issues, including cardiovascular problems, daytime fatigue and

impaired cognitive function. Many people are unaware of the signs and symptoms of sleep apnea, and the importance of seeking treatment. We have introduced Nuffield ENT and Nuffield Sleep to address these issues, providing specialised care to diagnose and treat sleep apnea effectively.

Last but not least, we are also currently working on launching our own app, which we believe is important for the benefit of our patients. The app will facilitate better patient engagement, streamline appointment scheduling, and provide easy access to medical records and health information. It will also enable telemedicine consultations, making healthcare more accessible and convenient for our patients.

What are some of the challenges and successes you had while establishing Nuffield Holdings?

SK: Establishing Nuffield Holdings has been a journey filled with challenges and successes. One significant challenge was navigating the regulatory environment and ensuring compliance with all healthcare standards. Additionally, building a cohesive team of professionals from diverse backgrounds required careful management and fostering a culture of collaboration.

In terms of successes, our successful integration of advanced technologies into our practices is one key milestone. It significantly improved patient outcomes and satisfaction. Expanding our services to include a wider range of healthcare specialties is another major milestone. It allowed us to provide comprehensive care under one roof. I am particularly proud of growing Nuffield as an SME, and diversifying it within the healthcare and wellness space.



Let's move on to personal health and wellness. How do you prioritise work-life balance in your personal life?

SK: Prioritising self-care and maintaining a good work-life balance is crucial, especially in a demanding field like healthcare. I have found that setting clear boundaries between work and personal time is essential. I make a conscious effort to leave work at the office, and focus on my family and personal interests when I'm at home. This separation helps me to recharge and return to work with renewed energy and focus.

One of the activities that brings me immense joy and relaxation is singing. Whether it's humming a tune while working or participating in more formal singing sessions, music has always been a wonderful outlet for me. It allows me to express myself creatively and serves as a great stress reliever.



I also enjoy reading about gadgetry, space exploration and aliens. These interests not only provide a mental escape from the everyday demands of work, but also inspire a sense of wonder and curiosity. Staying updated on the latest technological advancements and scientific discoveries keeps my mind engaged and fuels my passion for continuous learning.

Spending quality time with family and friends is another key component of my work-life balance. Sharing moments with loved ones, enjoying meals together, or simply having a good conversation helps me to stay grounded. It reminds me of the importance of personal connections.

Do you set any health and wellness goals for yourself?

SK: Yes, I do set certain health and wellness goals for myself, and I make a concerted effort to integrate them into my daily routine. One of my primary health goals is to maintain a regular exercise regimen. I try to engage in physical activity at least three times a week, which includes a mix of cardiovascular exercises and strength training. Starting my day with a workout not only energises me but also sets a positive tone for the rest of the day. It helps me to stay focused, reduces stress, and improves my overall physical health.

Another key wellness goal I have is to ensure that I get adequate sleep. I aim for at least six hours of quality sleep

each night. Good sleep is essential for recovery, mental clarity, and maintaining a strong immune system. I follow a consistent sleep schedule and create a restful environment to promote better sleep hygiene.

Lastly, I prioritise spending quality time with my family and engaging in hobbies that bring me joy. These contribute to my overall happiness and help me to maintain a healthy work-life balance. This, in turn, enables me to perform at my best both personally and professionally, ensuring that I can provide the highest quality of care to my patients.

What are some core life principles you adhere to?

SK: I believe in integrity, compassion, continuous learning, resilience, excellence, balance, and empowerment. Integrity is at the heart of everything I do. I ensure honesty and transparency in all my dealings, which builds trust and credibility. Compassion is fundamental in my personal and professional life. It allows me to empathise with, and support my patients and loved ones.

Lifelong learning is crucial as the fields of dentistry and medicine are constantly evolving. Staying updated with the latest advancements helps me to improve my practice and provide the highest quality of care. On the other hand, resilience has enabled me to overcome various challenges, keeping me focused on my goals and maintaining a positive attitude during difficult times.

I strive for excellence in all aspects of my life, continually seeking improvements to provide exceptional care and achieve my highest potential. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for overall well-being. It allows me to be productive, fulfilled and happy. Lastly, I believe in



empowering others by providing the tools, knowledge and support they need to make informed decisions and achieve their goals. These principles shape who I am and guide my journey. They help me to make a positive difference in the lives of those I encounter.

We are coming to the end of our interview. Last couple of questions. First off, what advice would you give to aspiring healthcare professionals considering a career in dentistry/medicine?

SK: My first piece of advice would be to cultivate a genuine passion for helping others. This field demands a significant commitment of time and energy, and having a deep-seated desire to improve patients' lives will help you to stay motivated through the challenges.

It's essential to approach your education with curiosity and an open mind. Both dentistry and medicine are rapidly evolving fields, with constant advancements and new technologies. Stay updated with the latest research, be willing to learn continuously, and never stop seeking knowledge. Embrace lifelong learning as a core part of your professional journey.

You also need to develop strong communication skills. The ability to listen to your patients, understand their concerns, and explain treatment options clearly is crucial. Building trust and rapport with your patients is just as important as your technical skills. Empathy and compassion are key components of patient care.

For those interested in pursuing dual qualifications in both dentistry and medicine, be prepared for a demanding but rewarding path. Balancing the requirements of both fields requires dedication, resilience and effective time management. However, the integration of knowledge from both disciplines will enable you to provide comprehensive and holistic care, making a significant impact on your patients' overall health.

Lastly and very importantly, always maintain a good work-life balance. While dedication to your career is important, it's equally crucial to take care of your own health and well-being. A balanced lifestyle will help you to stay focused, reduce burnout, and ensure that you can provide the best care for your patients.

Parting advice for Prime readers?

SK: Prioritise balance in all aspects of your life. Strive for a healthy work-life balance, and ensure that you allocate time for your career, family and personal interests. Invest in your health by adopting regular exercise, a balanced diet and adequate sleep. And remember that mental health is just as important as physical health; seek support when needed and practise mindfulness to manage stress. You should also continuously pursue personal and professional growth through lifelong learning and adaptability. Cherish your relationships and make time for the people who matter the most to you. By maintaining balance and focusing on overall well-being, you can lead a fulfilling and meaningful life. **PRIME**