“Dentistry has always been my first priority”
An interview with Muhammad Hafiz Zainal

Twenty-one-year-old Muhammad Hafiz Zainal is an aspiring dental student from Malaysia. He also sings and performs on the videosharing platform YouTube, where he recently came second in a world-wide singing contest held by Islamic record company Awakening Records. *Dental Tribune Asia Pacific* had the opportunity to speak with Hafiz, who is studying dentistry at Alexandria University in Egypt, about how he came to launch an online music career and the reasons he is still pursuing a professional existence in dentistry in addition to his singing.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *Hafiz, you are in Malaysia at the moment. Were you aware of the protests in your guest country, and what was the situation there when you left for the holidays?*

Muhammad Hafiz Zainal: Protesters have been held almost every week for a while now, generally after the Juma’a prayer. I left Egypt for Malaysia at the end of July, just one day before President Morsi was removed from power. The situation was very serious, with protesters becoming more and more aggressive and police officers throwing gas bombs. As appreciation, I never went outside my house when demonstrations were underway. Besides, the traffic became extremely congested and it was difficult for me to get anywhere. It is a very serious situation in terms of safety.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *What do you like most about studying dentistry in Egypt? There are a number of good dental schools in Malaysia. However, there are a very large number of very good dental schools, fees are very high when you do not have a scholarship. Therefore, the main reason is that you can get to Egypt to pursue your studies in dentistry because the fees are much more affordable.*

Muhammad Hafiz Zainal: Besides, the facilities in our local universities are very poor and do not offer any help to students. They don’t have enough human resources and equipment to train and prepare young dentists to become a dentist to help many other people so that they can smile brightly and have greater confidence.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *Why did you decide to study dentistry in Egypt?* Since Egypt is also an Islamic country, it is easier for me to get along with the locals. And there is never any problem finding halal food.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *Would you consider giving up your studies to become a dentist or singer?*

Muhammad Hafiz Zainal: I feel that dentistry is the main profession that I want to pursue in the future. I encourage all people to go to dental institutions and improve the facilities in our local universities to enable them to enrol more students. There is a great deal of experience by working abroad; however, I think I will serve my country for several years first.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *How do you feel about the growing interest in dentistry?* Malaysia has significant shortage of dentists. There are more opportunities for you to pursue your career there, and you would consider working abroad?

Muhammad Hafiz Zainal: Indeed, Malaysia is in urgent need of more dentists. Their number, however, is increasing, as the country is expanding the number of dental institutions and improving the facilities in our local universities to enable them to enrol more students. It is true that one can gain a great deal of experience by working abroad; however, I think I will serve my country for several years first.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *Some universities in Egypt are interested in dentistry. Is this due to the shortage of dentists?* In fact, the need of more dentists. Their number, however, is increasing, as the country is expanding the number of dental institutions and improving the facilities in our local universities to enable them to enrol more students. It is true that one can gain a great deal of experience by working abroad; however, I think I will serve my country for several years first.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *Would you consider giving up your studies if someone offered you a record deal, and would you rather be a successful dentist or singer?* I feel that dentistry is the main profession that I want to pursue in the future. I encourage all people to go to dental institutions and improve the facilities in our local universities to enable them to enrol more students. There is a great deal of experience by working abroad; however, I think I will serve my country for several years first.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *What kind of music do you prefer?* I like R&B, ballads, pop and soul music. They really suit my voice and singing style. I love songs that are intended to inspire in particular, as they really inspire me each time I listen to the lyrics. I have many music idols, but recently I have been listening to Mariah Carey, Chris Brown and Maher Zain, a Lebanese-Swedish singer and songwriter, a lot.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *What are your future plans or dreams?* I first realised that I am gifted at singing when I was five years old. I remember that my kindergarten teacher always asked me to sing in class. Knowing that there are many successful singers nowadays who have been discovered through their YouTube videos really inspired me to share my talent and sign them up right away. We will never know if we don’t try. For me, it is now or never.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *Would you consider giving up your studies if someone offered you a record deal, and would you rather be a successful dentist or singer?* I feel that dentistry is the main profession that I want to pursue in the future. I encourage all people to go to dental institutions and improve the facilities in our local universities to enable them to enrol more students. There is a great deal of experience by working abroad; however, I think I will serve my country for several years first.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: *Thank you very much for the interview.*