

ALLAN REID SIZE 10

Audio Producer: Rob Eagle

My name is Alan Reid. I'm what's called Specialty Registrar in public health medicine and I work in the West Midlands at Solihull. I started as a registrar in 2012, so I wasn't always working in public health. Previous to that I had the clinical role as a dentist. So I was a dentist for seventeen years.

I was born in Glasgow - probably tell from the accent, went to school just outside Glasgow in Paisley. Quite studious, academic - probably nerdy child. Came from a medical family; my mother was a senior nurse, my sister, older sister she went into nursing as well and I was probably the clever one and I think my mother wanted me to go and do medicine I was thinking of doing medicine but then I was never out the dentist because I grew up in the 1980s with a Glasgow diet of sugar and I was never out the dentist having cavities done and my dentist was very friendly and I was probably looking as a role model at that time because, I don't know, I think probably a lot of teenagers when you're gay especially in Scotland in the 1980s, that's probably what, you know, I was looking for - a role model. He seemed to fit that, he had a medical job and I thought actually maybe I wont do medicine, maybe I'll do dentistry instead. That's really how I became a dentist, in reply to dental school and got accepted and qualified from dental school in 1991, way last century.

I started practicing in Glasgow and the reason I moved down to London is I met someone online - this is probably the early times of online, your Gaydars and gay.coms and I met a guy who was from Montenegro and Former Yugoslavia. He moved to London in 1999 and we got chatting and he came up to Glasgow for a year and thought you know "it's better down in London. I think you'd be better off down there" and I said "OK let's do it."

Carried on, I got a job in a practice in Lewisham everything was fine. My partner and I, the Montenegrin partner and I, split up around 2006 but we stayed friends. We kind of lost touch a little bit but still in contact occasionally, until I found that he'd been diagnosed HIV positive and of course we'd been together for quite a number of years. And I thought, well I plan to get myself tested, but knowing that if I never got myself tested and it was a positive result that would be the end of my career.

Eventually I decided to get tested, you know initially to find out what the result would be and it was a positive result. So I had to struggle with what to do. Initially, I didn't disclose to anyone except for a few close friends and then one day I was at work, about three or four months after my HIV diagnosis and I got a phone call from the Health Protection Agency. It was a government agency that deals with medical threats to health through a phone call from the local office to say that *The Sun* newspaper had been in touch and that they got a story from someone that I was a dentist and practicing, knowingly practicing, while HIV positive. And I left the surgery for the last time, left the industry that day in 2008.

The Policy started in 1990, obviously HIV became an issue in the mid 80s. The recommendation from the department of health was any health care worker was banned from health care so, that policy kind of remained and then obviously they kind of relaxed it for non-surgical performing health care workers when they realised there wasn't a risk, so but for people like me, surgeons, dentists, midwives, theater assistants and anyone who's working in the surgical field, everybody HIV positive they just weren't allowed to work. That was the end of their career. About three or four days after I had to give up work, of course *The Sun* newspaper printed their story under the usual *Sun* newspaper banner of 'Aids Dentist' you know, with the most unflattering picture that was taken, that they took of me from a hidden camera across the street to make me look just completely awful.

And I thought OK you know, my world was collapsing round about me, I was distraught. I was a nervous wreck. I just remember the fear and anxiety, and I ended having my house repossessed and basically having to throw myself in the mercy of friends. And for somewhere to stay, effectively being homeless. So, going from a dentist with seventeen years practice always paying my bills never you know, really not wanting for anything. Certainly not very rich but comfortable. To going to nothing. It was a real wake up call. You know it was a really difficult time. In fact I had some tax and some bills outstanding that I didn't have any income to put against so I ended up having to go bankrupt. So my HIV status, in terms of the impact on my life, was pretty devastating.

My friend Mike said look come out to my house in Italy and just get away from all the press. So yeah, I ended up living there for just over a year living a different completely different kind of life. It was probably actually what I needed, it was a place where no one knew the story and I could really recover I suppose. I came back from Italy all renewed and full of hope and with a plan to what I was going to do. I went back to university and did a master's in public health but then I found out about training as a consultant public health and moved into public health in 2012 and the post that I got offered was Birmingham. I'd never actually lived or been to Birmingham. I'd passed through it on the train, I thought well you can go have a new beginning in Birmingham and that's how I ended up living here.

Since 2005 there was a review of changing the guidance to allow HIV positive health care workers back to surgical procedures. If they were on antivirals and had an undetectable viral load, which is the whole point of taking antiviral, there's more and more evidence to show that someone who has an undetectable viral load can't transmit the HIV virus to anyone else either sexually or through blood to blood for it might happen through a surgery for example.

The thing that was missing, up until that point is no one had, there was anecdotal stories of "Dentist A: This happened to them and they said this, and it was really terrible, wow" And to me there was no face to it, there was no one prepared to actually say. "You know, I am Alan and I'm a dentist, this happened to me." Obviously my name was already in *The Sun* newspaper online with 'Aids Dentist' but I thought well, I'm going to take control of this and take ownership of it and you know if there's going to be press for me, it'll be on my terms. And maybe that would help to dilute the negative stuff that was there. So I did a few interviews and newspaper interviews and it was really a very positive outcome. They saw my side of it, and I was able to put my story across - and of course that, having that named person, or a face to it, a name to it gave certainly more power and influence to medical and dental defense union and the indemnity groups who are working with the government experts to get this change to occur.

And I'm happy to say in 2012/2013, that's when the first guidance came through that within the year it was going to be changed and the guidance actually officially changed on January 1st, 2014.

Bearing in mind that it wasn't really my choice to give up dentistry, it was kind of forced on me and I had to find something else to do, I decided to see if I would perhaps want to combine a career with public health with going back to dentistry. If only to go back to dentistry just to say I can. So that's the reason why I'm looking at possibly returning to dental practice.