

**Dr. Chandler Humphreys Welcomes  
Dr. Mai Lati  
to  
Columbia Family Dental**



**The End of a Long Journey**

Nearly 7,000 airline miles separate Homs, Syria from Columbia, Mississippi, two cities as far apart in culture as they are in distance. Yet dentist Mai Lati found her way to this small South Mississippi town from her native Syria: This December she joins Columbia Family Dental.

Dr. Lati's path to her new dental assignment began about a dozen years ago when, with nearly a decade of experience with her own dental practice in Syria, she left it for a new life in America.

The reason? Love.

"It was a case of following your heart," says Dr. Lati.

Her "heart" was for a medical doctor, who had found a professional home at Hattiesburg Clinic. In the course of a few months, she sold everything pertaining to her practice in Homs, and moved to the States after marriage.

And if all these life-upending changes weren't enough, she also couldn't immediately practice dentistry in her new home.

"Although I was fully trained as a dentist in Syria, the differences in dentistry between the two countries required additional study at a dental school in the U.S. to obtain a license," says Dr. Mati.

In the meantime, though, Dr. Mati settled into her new life in America. She became occupied with the births of their two daughters, attending to the needs of her home and studying English at the English Language Institute at the University of Southern Mississippi where she completed a full five levels.

But though she was happy, her desire to once again practice dentistry never faded.

In 2016, she undertook graduate studies at the University of Southern Mississippi, earning a master's degree in Public Health in 2018.

“There are great differences in healthcare practices between Syria and the United States, and I wanted to learn more about the healthcare system in the U.S.,” she says. “Through my graduate studies, I gained a greater understanding of the American system.”

Ultimately, though, her sights remained on earning her U.S. dentistry license. To do so she had to pass Part I and Part II of the written National Board Dental Examinations and then attend a U.S. school of dentistry. Passing the boards was not a problem for her—she was able to pass both exams on her first attempt. But before she could attend dental school, she needed shadowing hours with other dentists.

Because Dr. Lati and her family were attending St. Thomas Catholic Church, they had developed contacts within the Christian community around Hattiesburg. She learned about Edwards Street Fellowship Center, a United Methodist outreach ministry that also offered community healthcare services.

“Mai reached out to us, asking about our dental services,” says Ann McCullen, executive director of ESFC. “She explained she needed shadowing hours to apply for a dental school, and wanted to know if we had any opportunities.”

McCullen was happy to oblige and arranged for her to shadow Dr. Jim Bishop, a retired dentist who volunteered with the center, during patient eligibility screenings.

“We were all immediately impressed, including Dr. Bishop, with Mai’s demeanor and professionalism,” says McCullen. “She is a delight—very kind, compassionate and intelligent.”

Dr. Melinda Lucas, a dentist with Oak Grove Family Dentistry, echoed Ann McCullen. “She truly is a gentle, lovely person.”

McCullen had contacted Dr. Lucas to help Dr. Lati obtain additional shadowing hours. She spent a few weeks at the Oak Grove clinic, making a similar impression as she did at ESFC.

“Being around her, you could tell she was in dentistry for the right reasons,” says Dr. Lucas. “Her heart was truly in it.”

With passing the national boards, English proficiency exams, and the required shadowing hours, Dr. Lati applied for dental school and was accepted at the University of South California dental school. She graduated with a DDS degree from Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC in May 2022.

As she was completing it and obtaining her license, Dr. Chandler Humphreys of Columbia Family Dental was contemplating his own project—recruiting a new dentist for the practice.

“Our clinic had seen such tremendous growth that I had ‘called’ my dad out of retirement to help streamline the business side of the practice,” says Dr. Humphreys. His father, Ray Humphreys, a retired hospital administrator, advised expanding the practice with another dentist.

During his search, Dr. Humphreys happened to make contact with a mutual friend and a colleague dentist. “He recommended I get in touch with someone who had just finished with school and he thought she would be a good fit for us. That person was Mai Lati.”

After meeting with Dr. Lati, Dr. Humphreys soon realized he had found Columbia Family Dental’s newest dentist.

“There was such a calm about her, and I could tell she had an empathetic heart,” says Dr. Humphreys. “It may sound weird, but connecting with her has been a God thing—something that was meant to be. We all cannot wait for her to begin in December.”

Dr. Lati is equally elated: For her, it has been a long road to return to the profession she loves. “I’m a little nervous, but more excited than nervous,” says Dr. Lati. “To me, the most important aspects within a dental practice are good communication and a sense of teamwork. That’s what I sense from Dr. Humphreys and the staff. I am so glad to be part of Columbia Family Dental team.”

Dr. Humphreys’ friend and fellow dentist Melinda Lucas seconds that feeling: “I believe Dr. Lati will be a great addition to Dr. Humphreys’ practice, and to Columbia.”

