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

Muhammad Hafiz Zainal:

Twenty-one-year-old Muhammad Hafiz Zainal is an aspiring dental student from Malaysia. He also sings and performs on the video-sharing platform YouTube, where he recently came second in a worldwide 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:

Protests have been held almost every week for a while now, generally after the Jumu‘ah 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 protestors becoming more and more aggressive and police officers throwing gas bombs. As a precaution, 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.

Why did you decide to study dentistry in Egypt? There are a number of good dental schools in Malaysia. Although there are a number of very good dental schools, fees are very high when you do not have a scholarship. Therefore, the main reason I decided to go to Egypt to pursue my studies in dentistry was because the fees there are much more affordable. Some universities in Egypt are also recognised by Malaysia, which will allow me to work in my home country after I have graduated.

Since Egypt is also an Islamic country, it is easy for me to get along with the locals. And there is never any problem finding halal food.

What do you like most about studying dentistry?

The art of providing patients with an attractive and confident smile. One of the main reasons I became interested in dentistry is due to the problems I had with my teeth during my childhood in terms of aesthetics. It was very difficult for me to talk to people, so that is why I decided to become a dentist to help many other people so that they can smile brightly and have greater confidence.

It is very important to keep our teeth healthy, as it enhances our self-esteem. It has always been my dream to have my own clinic where I can make patients smile with satisfaction each time after treatment.

Malaysia has a significant shortage of dentists. What are you career possibilities there, and would you consider working abroad?

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.

Another major part of your life is singing and you regularly upload videos to your own YouTube channel. When did you first realise that you can sing, and how did you come to post your videos online?

I first realised that I was 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 with the world. It has always been my dream to have my own clinic where I can make patients smile with satisfaction.

What kind of music do you produce? Are you interested in any other genres?

I am generally 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.

A few very successful singers began their careers on YouTube, such as Justin Bieber. Do you consider the platform a springboard to fame, and would you recommend it to young people who want to launch a singing career?

Absolutely. There are so many young talents out there who are eager to share their precious gifts with the world. I encourage them to post videos on YouTube and see how people around the world react. Eventually, they will start to gain some followers and fans. Maybe a recording company will realise their talent and sign them up right away. We will never know if we don’t try. For me, it is now or never.

Malaysian Idol, a spin-off of the successful UK talent show was cancelled in 2007 after only two seasons. Has YouTube generally become the better platform for discovering talents?

Both formats have their advantages and disadvantages. Reality TV shows like Malaysian Idol are a great platform to become famous in Malaysia and neighbouring countries, but the whole world will become aware of you if you have millions of viewers and subscribers on YouTube.

Would you consider giving up your studies if someone offered you a record deal?

I am eager to share my precious gifts with the world. I encourage them to post videos on YouTube and see how people around the world react. Eventually, they will start to gain some followers and fans. Maybe a recording company will realise their talent and sign them up right away. We will never know if we don’t try. For me, it is now or never.

Music idols have always been my first priority. My passion however belongs to both fields. I will try to balance my time wisely to be able to pursue my career in the music industry while continuing my studies in dentistry. My goal actually is to become Malaysia’s first singing dentist.

Thank you very much for the interview. 