

»MY EXPERIENCE IN HR HAS SHAPED THE WAY I LOOK AT OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES. WHEN SOMETHING IS NOT WORKING, MY FIRST QUESTION IS NOT ONLY "WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE PROCESS?" BUT ALSO, "WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH THE TEAM BEHIND THAT PROCESS?". SOMETIMES THE ANSWER IS MORE TRAINING, BETTER COMMUNICATION OR STRONGER LEADERSHIP; AT OTHER TIMES, PEOPLE SIMPLY NEED TO FEEL HEARD.« **ANDREEA NECULA, OPERATIONS & HR DIRECTOR DENT ESTET & LEADERSHIP TRAINER ADOM, GMP 2024, ROMANIA**

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Interviewed by Vera Pasyunkova,
photos provided by: Andreea Necula

Tell us a little bit about when and how did you join DENT ESTET?

What led you to that decision?

I joined DENT ESTET at a time when I was ready for a professional change and wanted to make a more decisive move into HR. Until then, I had worked mainly in recruitment agencies, while also beginning to take on HR

responsibilities at the FMCG company I was working for at the time.

The opportunity came through the recommendation of a close friend who was working in executive search. What made a real difference, however, was my first interaction with Dr. Oana Taban, the Founder and CEO at the time. I was impressed by her entrepreneurial

mindset, her energy and the clarity of her vision for DENT ESTET. The possibility of working directly with the entrepreneur behind the business was particularly important to me. I felt that I would not only be taking on an HR role, but also have the opportunity to learn first-hand how a company is built, developed and led.

When I joined DENT ESTET, the group had seven clinics

in two cities and a medical team of approximately 80 doctors. Today, we have reached 17 clinics across eight cities, with a total team of around 600 people, including approximately 160 doctors. Looking back, being part of this development is one of the experiences I value most in my professional journey. Over the years, Oana and I worked closely together through different stages of growth, from expanding into new cities and opening new clinics to integrating teams, developing structures and adapting the organization as the business became increasingly complex.

For me, this journey has always been more than simply scaling a network. It meant growing alongside the company, taking on progressively broader responsibilities and learning directly from an entrepreneur with a very strong vision and extraordinary determination to build. Working so closely with Oana throughout these years gave me a perspective on leadership, resilience and entrepreneurship that would have been very difficult to gain in a more traditional corporate environment.

That combination — the

right professional timing, the transition I wanted to make toward HR, and the opportunity to work closely with Oana — made my initial decision feel very natural. What I could not have anticipated at the time was how much that decision would shape my own professional path and how closely my own development would become connected to the growth of DENT ESTET.

Despite being Romania's undisputed market leader, DENT ESTET holds roughly 3% to 5% of the total national dental market due to extreme sector fragmentation. How do you view this low consolidation rate, and what will it take for corporate chains to capture a larger overall share?

The low consolidation rate reflects the structure of the Romanian dental market, which is still dominated by independent practices and small clinics built around the reputation of one or a few doctors. This makes the market highly fragmented, but also highly entrepreneurial.

Romania has one of the highest densities of practising dentists in the EU, with 113,3 dentists per 100,000 inhabitants. In 2024, there were 21,272 practising dentists and 17,450 individual dental practices — illustrating both the size and fragmentation of the market.

For larger groups to increase their share, growth cannot come simply from opening or acquiring more clinics. The real challenge is to demonstrate that scale creates additional value.

For patients, this means consistent standards of care, multidisciplinary expertise, technology and a predictable experience. For doctors, it means access to infrastructure, education and professional development, supported by strong capabilities in management, HR, marketing and technology. At the same time, consolidation in healthcare requires trust. Dentistry remains a highly personal medical service, so preserving the doctor-patient relationship, as well as the identity and medical culture of each clinic, is essential.

I believe the next phase of consolidation will therefore be driven not only by capital, but by the ability to combine scale, medical quality, operational discipline and patient experience, while preserving the entrepreneurial spirit of the market.

From DENT ESTET's perspective, the opportunity is not simply to gain market share, but to help raise the standard of modern dental care in Romania.

As Operational Director at DENT ESTET, you oversee a wide network of



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specialized dental clinics. What are the biggest operational bottlenecks when scaling premium healthcare services, and how have you navigated them?

Scaling premium healthcare is not only about opening more clinics. As the network grows, the real challenge is ensuring that every patient receives the same level of care, attention and trust, regardless of the clinic they visit.

One of the biggest operational challenges is maintaining consistency — in medical standards, team performance and the way decisions are translated into daily practice. As the network expands, even small differences can quickly become visible.

Another major challenge is people. Procedures can be standardized, but healthcare is ultimately delivered by teams, and strong teams need leadership, the right culture and time to develop. The key is finding the right balance between clear operational frameworks and enough autonomy for each clinic and medical team.

Technology and data also become increasingly important. We need visibility across the network, clear KPIs and systems that identify issues early, without turning healthcare into a purely numerical exercise.

Our approach has been to build structure without

losing the human side of healthcare. Over the past 10 years at DENT ESTET, I have learned that successful scaling requires listening as much as standardizing — staying close to clinics, understanding what happens on the ground and adapting when reality differs from what works on paper.

Ultimately, the objective is simple: every patient should feel listened to, well cared for and confident in their treatment, whether they visit a DENT ESTET clinic in Bucharest or elsewhere in the country.

Leading both Operations and HR has also taught me that organizational performance is neither just about processes nor just about people — it is about how well the two work together. Operations requires structure, clear responsibilities, KPIs and consistency. But these only work when people understand the direction, trust the leadership and feel they have a meaningful role in moving the organization forward.

When something is not working, I look not only at

the process, but also at the team behind it. The answer may be better training, communication or leadership — or simply making sure people feel heard.

This is especially important in healthcare, where medical and administrative teams have different roles but share the same objective: creating the best possible patient experience. My role is to connect these worlds and ensure people understand not only what they need to do, but why it matters.

I believe resilience is built before you need it — through strong teams, honest communication, clear expectations and leaders who remain close to operational reality.

For me, the balance is to create clear processes that help people perform without limiting initiative, ownership or the human side of the organization. Combining HR and Operations allows me to look at performance not only through numbers, but through the people who make those numbers possible.

With an already established senior executive career,



what made you choose the General Management Program (GMP) at IEDC-Bled School of Management? How did enrolling into the GMP program align with your leadership goals at that stage?

I have always valued continuous learning, and reaching a senior leadership role actually made me feel that it was the right moment to broaden my perspective even further. The General Management Program felt like a natural next step - not for another title or certificate, but for the opportunity to challenge myself and step outside my usual way of thinking.

The recommendation of a colleague who had previously attended IEDC programs also mattered a lot. He spoke very highly of the school, and especially of Dr. Nenad Filipović, which definitely influenced my decision.

During the GMP, I had the privilege of having Nenad as my project mentor. I am genuinely grateful for what I learned from him and for the way he guided me, with clarity, patience and just the right amount of challenge. And there is also a nice personal circle to it: it is thanks to Nenad that

I had the opportunity to take part in this interview, which makes the whole experience even more meaningful to me.

Looking back at your time at IEDC in 2024, which specific module, case study, faculty member or strategic framework made the most immediate impact on your day-to-day decision-making?

There were several parts of the GMP that stayed with me because I could relate them directly to my day-to-day work.

ways. They reminded me that leadership is not only about strategy and execution, but also about perspective, adaptability and understanding how people respond to change. And then there was one experience that probably brought many of those lessons together in the most unexpected way: rowing on Lake Bled during the final module. It sounds simple, but being in that boat made something very clear to me - you need to know your team, trust them and be able to rely on each other. You can have very



Developing Competitive Advantage with Salman Mufti was particularly valuable because it made me look more critically at what truly differentiates an organization, beyond what we sometimes assume is our competitive advantage. I also found the **Leading Change** and **Arts and Leadership** modules very powerful, in very different

strong individuals, but if everyone rows at a different rhythm, you simply don't move forward.

That moment stayed with me because it was such a simple, physical reminder of something I experience in leadership every day: real results are rarely individual; they come when people understand each other,

You can have very strong individuals, but if everyone rows at a different rhythm, you simply don't move forward.

trust each other and move in the same direction.

Executive classrooms at IEDC gather leaders from diverse sectors across CEE and beyond. How did sharing perspectives with non-healthcare executives challenge or redefine your approach to management?

IEDC was valuable to me precisely because it took me outside healthcare. Sharing a classroom with executives from very different industries challenged some assumptions I had about what was “specific” to medical organizations.

What surprised me most was realizing, through conversations with colleagues, how similar many of the situations we face are across countries and industries. Leadership, communication, accountability, change, performance - the context may be different, but the underlying challenges are often the same.

I found the exchange of perspectives particularly valuable. Sometimes, a single comment from someone working in a completely different industry can make you see a familiar problem differently. For me, that was one of the strongest parts of the experience; it made me more willing to question, less attached to “the way things are usually done,” and more comfortable borrowing ideas from



outside healthcare when they make sense.

Through ADOM (Association of Dental Office Managers), you train future dental practice managers. Tell us a little bit more about the association itself and your role in it.

ADOM was founded in 2013 with a very practical mission: to support the professionalization of dental practice management through education, practical tools and a strong professional community. Today, it brings together more than 2,000 dentists, dental office managers, front desk professionals and healthcare entrepreneurs.

In ADOM, I am involved as a trainer and contributor, especially in areas connected to operations, people management and organizational development. What matters to me is bringing real situations into the room - decisions that worked, things we would do differently, and tools that

participants can actually use in their own clinics. And perhaps this is what I value most about ADOM: experience is meant to be shared. I know how much of what I have learned came from being close to people who were willing to share their own experience, so being able to pass some of that forward feels very natural to me. At the same time, I learn a great deal from the people who come to our programs. Their questions and the challenges they face keep us very connected to what is really happening in dental practices across Romania.

For me, ADOM is ultimately about helping people become more confident managers and better leaders, so they can build stronger teams and healthier organizations.

What core skill or mindset is most missing in modern healthcare administration, and how are you addressing it in leadership trainings?

For me, what is still too

often missing in healthcare administration is the understanding that people are not just part of the system, they are what makes the system work.

You can have strong processes, clear KPIs and well-designed procedures, but if people don't feel supported, listened to and valued, performance will always be fragile. In healthcare especially, leadership has to be very human.

I believe in staying close to the people I work with, not only professionally, but also on a personal level. It is not enough to say that your door is always open. If someone calls you because they need help, advice or simply reassurance, you should answer. Sometimes the most important leadership moments are not in meetings or presentations, but in a five-minute conversation when someone needs to know that you are there.

This is also something I try to bring into leadership trainings. Strong teams are built through trust, consistency and presence. People need clarity and accountability, of course, but they also need to

feel that their leader knows them, understands their challenges and will stand beside them when things become difficult.

For me, leadership is not about being available in theory. It is about being present in practice. That is what creates trust, and trust is what ultimately makes teams stronger and more resilient.

Since life is not about work only, how do you balance your demanding work and juggling day-to-day family responsibilities and tasks?

I don't think I manage the balance on my own. I rely a lot on my husband, who has supported me throughout and has always been there, especially during the most demanding periods. Having that kind of partnership at home makes a huge difference.

We have two teenage boys, and although they are becoming more independent, they are still at an age when they need support, guidance and presence. The good part is that they are very cooperative and serious, which helps enormously, but I still try to make sure they feel that I am there when they need me.

With a busy role, family responsibilities do not disappear just because work gets intense, so for me it is very much about teamwork, flexibility and accepting that not every day will be perfectly balanced.

Sometimes work needs more of me, sometimes family does.

Over time, I have learned that balance is not really about dividing everything equally. It is about having the right people around you, trusting each other and knowing that when one person has a demanding period, the others step in. For me, that support at home has been essential, and I am very aware that I could not do what I do professionally without it.

Your favourite way to unwind after a particularly intense day at work?

Nothing complicated: a film and a glass of wine with my husband, or popcorn and a movie with the boys. Quiet evenings at home help me switch off better than anything else.

Weekends are also very much about family. We almost always have lunch together, and I really enjoy the small routines, a walk around the neighbourhood, or going out for coffee with my husband on Sunday morning. I think, especially when work is intense, these ordinary moments become the most valuable ones. They help me slow down, reconnect and feel grounded again.



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WHAT ONE CANNOT FIND ON ANDREEA'S RESUME



GMP 2024

Andreea Necula **Romania**

Operations & HR Director
DENT ESTET &
Leadership Trainer ADOM

Have you ever been afraid of a dentist as a child? And why?

Like most Romanians, I used to go to the dentist only when I really needed to. I was actually very lucky and had no dental problems, so it was never really about fear. What I remember most are the smells and sounds of the old dental practices. Definitely enough to make me want to stay away as much as possible.

Apple or Android? YT music or Spotify?

Apple user and fan forever 😊 Spotify always. Family subscription.

What kind of music/radio/podcast plays in your car (earphones) while you are stuck in a traffic jam in Bucharest?

I try to find a blend of '90 rock and what my 2 teens are listening, to have common ground. Not necessarily works, so I'm sticking to classic rock, adding Beth Hart, Teddy Swims, Imagine Dragons. I have a special hard rock playlist for my running sessions.

Do you have any pets? If yes, what is it and its name?

Of course. Our family is completed by our lovely 2 black cats, Ruby and Titi, a new entry Tommie (yes, he's actually a she), that we saved in one of our walks across the neighborhood, and also, we have inherited from my cousin 2 rabbits.

Your favourite childhood food?

Like any child, fries.

What was the last book you've read?

451 Fahrenheit, by Ray Bradbury.

Any sports or interesting hobbies you practice?

I enjoy running and going to the gym, trying to have 2-3 training sessions per week. Also, cycling is one way of relaxing together with my husband.

What was your last holiday destination?

During summer, we come back to Greece, it's always a pleasure, enjoying the sun and great vibes.

The latest film/tv series you watched that you can recommend?

I just finished the second season of Guy Ritchie's The Gentlemen and really enjoyed it. The way the scenes are built, the sharp dialogue, and the language throughout are excellent. Very stylish, witty, and unmistakably Guy Ritchie.

Are you on Duolingo? If yes, which language are you learning or are you playing chess there?:)

Not quite 😊 I just thought I'd give it a try and finally start learning Italian.