

From dental therapy to BDS Dentistry

Mia Mortimer, 25, from Paisley loved being a dental therapist but wanted to take her scope of practice even further, and applied for dentistry.

I have always been interested in dentistry for as long as I can remember. Yes, I was THAT strange child! My dentist once said to my Dad that if I didn't end up working in dentistry I'd become a serial killer (ouch!).

When sitting my Highers in High School we lost my Dad after a three-year battle with cancer. Simply put, I didn't receive the grades to get accepted into dentistry.

It was a devastating point in my life but it did lead me to research the dental team further. I really liked the dental therapist's role: very niche and with an opportunity to help lots of adults and children with dental, and quite often debilitating, diseases. I decided to pursue dental therapy.

I didn't realise just how special it was getting accepted onto a dental therapy course until I had undergone the rigorous interviewing at Dundee University and realised we had a class of just ten candidates.

I qualified as a dental therapist in 2016 and absolutely loved the job. It exceeded all my expectations of what I thought it would be like as a career.

I worked in three practices full time, all mixed NHS/independent practices but in very different areas with different patient demographics.

As a dental therapist I love taking patients through their journey of treatment, especially periodontal treatment. To support these patients and see them have a fantastic result can



Mia in her Christmas tunic, pictured with her Mum

sometimes be emotional when both the patient and I put so much work in. I particularly love working with kids. I think, when working with children, you have a very unique opportunity to ensure this little person has an excellent experience in your chair which sets them up for a good relationship with dentistry for life.

I didn't work during lockdown. Recently I worked in surgery for the first time since March, which was a bit scary, but it was brilliant to be back.

Applying for the BDS

I decided about a year or two ago to apply again to study dentistry, heavily nudged by my Mum and my boyfriend Ben - a big thank you to both of them for being so supportive. I thought - if I don't try now, I will always wonder 'What if?'

Dentistry can help so many people. I wanted to further my scope of practice to allow me to help more patients.

I chose to apply to Dundee as I enjoyed studying and my time there so much during my BSc and absolutely loved how integrated the BDS and BSc curriculum were. So... where else?

My first year on the BDS at Dundee began on 4 October 2020. I had planned on moving to Dundee and renting a flat. However, due to the pandemic Dundee have adopted a blended model of learning so I have been learning remotely and commuting through when I can for the odd socially distanced tutorial.

I was a bit nervous about being in the minority as a mature student on the course, but there are a number of mature students and postgraduates.

It was very straightforward to apply for student loans to study dentistry as a mature student. Unfortunately, I wasn't eligible for tuition funding but I should be able to claim from my second year.

Leaving dental therapy behind has been very bittersweet. I am so excited for this new chapter and all the new things that come with it but I am so sad to be saying goodbye to my colleagues/friends, patients and my therapist role.



Mia dressed as the tooth fairy for 'Health Week' at the school where her Mum works. Every year she goes to the school and reads a tooth fairy story to the 2-5-year-olds in the nursery and lower school; holds a fun educational presentation with a pop quiz about sugar in current favourite treats for older children; and also gives an educational presentation and Q&A at the end of the day for parents, grandparents and carers. Mia says: 'then I usually rush to work still covered in tooth fairy glitter!'

Hobbies and the future

In my spare time I like exercising and hill walking, which helped me complete two Tough Mudders [endurance events]. I have two mental dogs that keep me busy, too. Before the pandemic I quite often took part in local amateur drama group projects and choirs.



Mia taking part in Tough Mudder

Regarding my future career ambitions, I will see how my five years at dental school go and take things from there. I may take a special interest in periodontics and paediatric care.

Would I encourage other dental care professionals to apply to dental school? If you feel like it is the thing for you to further your skill set, GO FOR IT. It's not too scary, I promise... Ask me again in five years.

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