

'Research helps keep dentistry fresh'



BDJ Team Editor **Kate Quinlan** interviews Eleanor (Ellie) Taylor, a senior dental therapist who won a Robin Davies DCP research award in 2022.

Background

Ellie is a full time, senior dental therapist working in special care dentistry at Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust. She completed a Certificate of Higher Education, Dental Nursing at the University of Portsmouth in 2009 and a BSc Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy at the same institution in 2014. Her postgraduate education includes inhalation sedation and a Diploma in Paediatric Dentistry. She has worked in a variety of dental settings, including private, orthodontic and hospital paediatric departments.

Ellie says: 'I strive to provide excellent dentistry to all patient groups, endeavouring to create positive patient experiences at each appointment. I find paediatric and special care dentistry incredibly rewarding.'

During the past few years, Ellie has taken an interest in national dental research and supporting smaller research projects from their inception. In 2022 she received a Robin Davies DCP Research Award. These awards are presented by Colgate and the Oral and Dental Research Trust (ODRT), for research conducted by dental care professionals (DCPs).

Interview

Where are you from originally and where are you based now?

Ellie: I began my life in Shetland, then spent most of it in Grimsby before exploring the Southern coast of Portsmouth. I'm currently based in sunny West Sussex.

What were your ambitions when you were still at school?

I went through most job options: teacher, nurse, vet, air hostess. To my husband's dismay I haven't completely given up the dream of being a part-time farmer.

Do any of your family work in dentistry?

They do. A cousin is a brilliant dental nurse, and I've an uncle who is a dentist. While I was in college, my uncle facilitated my work experience to support my university application. It was great to have a week seeing a busy practice in action so that I knew what I was getting myself in for.

How did you first become a dental nurse?

In all honesty, I fell into it. I wasn't sure what to do after college. I wanted to move away

from where I'd grown up for a while, and I wanted to have the 'uni lifestyle' without the commitment of a three-year course. The University of Portsmouth offered the Certificate of Higher Education in Dental Nursing which was 15 months long – perfect!

What did you enjoy about dental nursing?

It's a hands-on job. I don't enjoy twiddling my thumbs while at work. There's always something to be getting on with in dentistry. I love the blend of patient support and putting science into practice.

Did you sign up to study the Certificate of Higher Education, Dental Nursing straight away?

Straight from A-levels. No time to waste!

Why did you decide to progress to become a dental hygienist and therapist?

While I was in a very supportive practice and loved my job, the people, and the patients, I felt that I wanted more responsibility and variety. Often I was nursing for the dental therapists in that practice and thought the job role had the best of everything: enough

variety and precise clinical work without the root canals and dentures.

Was it challenging to gain a place on the BSc Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy course?

I think it was a real stroke of luck on the interview day. I remember presenting artwork to demonstrate dexterity. The interview styles have changed to more practical presentations and observations which I'd love to watch. My experience as a dental nurse in a forward-thinking practice definitely helped.

Did you continue working in dentistry while you studied for your degree?

I did. There are some great agencies out there for dental nurses which were brilliantly flexible. I'd recommend any therapy students join an agency while training as a clinician; you pick up clinical skills without realising it.

I also worked in a bistro. Again, I'd recommend this to all therapy students! Dental courses can be all-consuming and it's important to have a break from it and different circles of friends to remind you that a study-life balance is achievable.

What did you enjoy about the course and what was the most challenging?

The city is busy, my coursemates were unique, the tutors were knowledgeable and encouraging, and the course content was interesting.

The most challenging thing was by far the scale of the course. It is 9 am–5 pm, 4.5 days a week. The workload is manageable but you do need to keep on top of it.

Once you had graduated, how did you find the job market?

When I first graduated it was a great market; I was very lucky. The local practice I'd worked in as a dental nurse offered me a job as a therapist, so I immediately put my new skills to use. I also enrolled on a vocational training scheme as by then I had an inkling that I was destined for special care and there was a training post close to where I lived.

Can you summarise your employment history since then?

Enrolling on the Vocational Training Scheme was possibly the best decision I've made since graduating as I feel like it fast-tracked me to where I would've inevitably ended up. My practice mentor was fabulous, pragmatic and skilled. Since then I've moved NHS Trusts, dabbled in orthodontics, completed a

Diploma in Paediatric Dentistry, worked in a Specialist Paediatric setting at the Eastman and worked in general NHS and private dentistry.

to admin staff to support the transcription and administrative side of it (hurrah!). Altogether, the award is supporting the progression of the project, much quicker than it otherwise would take.

'There's always something to be getting on with in dentistry. I love the blend of patient support and putting science into practice.'

How did you first get involved with dental research and what projects have you been working on?

A large chunk of my final term at university was taken up by a research project. The school encouraged us to work towards interesting, quality research and poster submissions. After graduating, I happened to be working with a consultant who needed an extra pair of hands on a research project, so I helped with the admin and rolling out of a programme. This led to the national RECUR trial, looking at repeat general anaesthetics for dental paediatrics and the use of motivational interviewing in assisting behaviour change.

For the past two years, my colleague and I have been working on this domiciliary project, specifically looking at improving access to this for the older patients.

I particularly like research that has direct implications for change and improving ways of working.

Reading what peers are up to as well in dental journals helps keep me interested in what I could do next.

Congratulations on winning an award recently at the ODRT/Colgate DCP research awards – how did it feel to win?

Thank you. This project was in inception two years ago when we were in touch with a medical student at Brighton Medical School. It's fantastic to be supported by Colgate to continue the research.

How will you use the award for your research project?

The award is enabling me and the team to travel to the University of Portsmouth Dental Academy and Peninsula Dental School for face-to-face focus groups. It's also allowing us to spend more time on the project outside of our usual working hours and offer additional hours

Is it difficult finding time for research alongside your day job?

It can absolutely be difficult for therapists to get into research in addition to their day job. It interrupts that work-life balance because it's inevitable that you'll take work home with you, even with a very understanding employer. If possible, get a clause in your contract about them supporting future research as this will let you spend more time on it at work. If you have a research idea you want to see through though, you'll make it work.

Research helps keep dentistry fresh, at least it does for me, so it's worth it.

What do you like to do outside work?

Believe me when I say that I'm no natural sports enthusiast, but my family seem to be getting into the habit of using sporting events as reasons to get together. Firstly, it was the Edinburgh Marathon Festival (no marathon for me, thank you), plenty of water sports, and most recently the National Three Peak Challenge.

Any special plans for 2023 and any career plans you'd like to share?

Personally, the big event of 2023 will be climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. What a relaxing holiday idea that was.

Professionally, I'd like to get this research spread far and wide. We're hopeful to inform policy change for the older person, to ensure that NHS domiciliary dentistry is available for all who need it.

To find out more about the ODRT and Colgate Robin Davies DCP Awards, visit <https://www.odrt.org.uk/award/colgate-robin-davies-dcp-awards>. Applications for the 2023 awards should be submitted by Friday 10 February 2023.

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