



‘I’m  
***determined***  
***TO SUCCEED***’

**Samantha Farrell, 29,** talks to *Vital* about her decision to move from the dental surgery to the dental laboratory.

#### DENTAL NURSING

**SAM:** *'I have always found laboratory work fascinating, particularly crown work. I think they are works of art and when I was dental nursing I would always have a look at the work when it came back from the lab...'*

When Samantha Farrell left school at 16, having a keen interest in law and forensic science she went to college to undertake paralegal studies, intending to work alongside a solicitor. On completing her studies, however, she decided that law wasn't the route that she wanted to take, that she enjoyed being in a busy environment and wasn't suited to sitting at a desk for eight hours a day. So, she left college unsure what to do next.

*'I needed a job in the meantime. I saw a job as a dental receptionist and decided to apply. I was asked back for a second interview at which I was asked if I would be interested in a role as a trainee dental nurse. In all honesty it wasn't a job that appealed to me but I decided to take it temporarily. After my first day, I enjoyed it so much I couldn't wait to enrol on the course!'*

Once Sam became a dental nurse she knew that it was something she would continue to enjoy and for that reason, would do well in.

*'I enjoy meeting the patients; you build up a great rapport with them; they tell you all about themselves and you get to know their families. It's lovely when patients come in after six months and you ask them about something they discussed at their last appointment and you can see that they are pleased that you listened and cared. It really puts people at ease if they feel like they are not just a number.'*

Sam loved everything about being a dental

nurse: the environment, the fact that every treatment was different and of course meeting the patients.

We asked Sam what sort of personal skills she thinks that she has that make her a good dental nurse.

*'I'm a very caring person. My main priority is to ensure the patient feels calm and comfortable with the treatment to be carried out, although patients don't always admit or show that they are nervous. No-one is 100% happy when they are in the dental chair, so it's important to treat every patient with care.'*

*'I also work well under pressure which is important as a nurse. You need to be able to work efficiently and calmly; I think the worst thing for a patient to feel is that the staff are stressed or not confident in what they are doing.'*

*'I work very methodically too, which is very handy in the surgery as each treatment is carried out in stages.'*

Sam particularly enjoyed the surgical treatments and spent a lot of time working as an implant nurse. She would often request to nurse with other dentists if they had a surgical case.

*'I think had I not chosen to train as a dental technician I would like to have gone into maxillofacial nursing or perhaps to work with a periodontist...'*

Sam found that in her practice everyone was friends and socialised outside of work, which created a good sense of team spirit and a nice atmosphere to work in.

*'This does make a difference in whether you enjoy going to work or not!'*

#### Oral health and registration

Being a dental nurse had an impact on Sam's perspective on oral health and her diet.

*'Straight away I cut down on things like sugar in my tea (I now have none) and fizzy drinks, but mainly I changed the times at which I ate/drank, keeping to mealtimes and so on - all of which I hadn't given a second thought to before. This was particularly the case as when I first started nursing I worked with a hygienist, so it was a real learning curve.'*

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*'I think friends and relatives are fed up of my advice! I can't watch someone drinking cola without telling them how well it cleans a penny, ha ha.'*

Sam soon signed up for a dental nursing qualification.

*'When I started work the mandatory qualifications for dental nurses were just coming in, so I started the NVQ Level 3 Dental Nursing and Oral Health in 2004 and qualified in 2005.'*

Sam, who is married with two sons aged five and four, took some time off when she started her family. When she returned to dental nursing General Dental Council (GDC) registration for dental nurses had just been introduced, so Sam registered in 2010.

*'I think GDC registration is a*



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*good idea because without it, it is difficult to ensure staff are trained, competent and up to date with new regulations etc. Having to provide CPD ensures that staff are up to date. I also think registration gives DCPs professional recognition. We undergo a lot of training and have a lot of responsibilities in our various roles. Although registration is there primarily to protect the public, it also shows the public that we are skilled professionals.'*

**DENTAL TECHNOLOGY**

Sam worked at three dental practices as a



dental nurse before leaving the third to pursue a career as a dental technician.

*'I was lucky enough to have a dental lab attached to my practice. I discussed with the dental technician that dental technology was something I was interested in and he invited me to spend a day in the lab where I could have a look at the process and have a go at making models. From then on I knew 100% that this was the career I wanted to pursue and I rang the college that day!'*

Sam's colleagues were very supportive of her career ambitions. They knew that she loved nursing but also that she wanted to do more within dentistry.

*'When they saw how excited I was to be making this career change they were very pleased for me.'*

Sam originally applied to do a BTEC in Dental Technology because she did not have A-levels, but at an interview at Birmingham Metropolitan College was told by the course leader that because of her background and level 3 dental nursing qualification, she would be offered a place on the degree level course.

*'I was so pleased, especially as it was for a degree level course which I never thought I'd get the chance to do! The course is run by Manchester Metropolitan University and based in Birmingham, which is great as there aren't many universities that run the degree course - so this makes it more accessible for me.'*

**THE COURSE**

Sam is studying for a degree in dental technology full time, but only has two practical sessions a week.

*'I'd prefer more lab time to be honest as I love getting hands-on, but it's important to have the underpinning knowledge in place in order to distinguish the degree qualification from the BTEC.'*

As the course is degree level, the content is very academic, mainly consisting of biology, chemistry and maths lectures, as well as practical/theory lectures. The course is assessed with an assignment per unit and then an exam at the end of the year for each unit.

*'I really enjoy attending the course. I think coming from a dental background has really*









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*helped me, and it's nice learning the reasons why we do things in the surgery which help the technicians construct an appliance. It's great seeing things from both sides and this will definitely help me become a good technician.'*

Sam thinks that she is well suited to becoming a dental technician:

*'I am a perfectionist and if something isn't perfect I will carry on until it is. I think the worst thing you could do is send out work that you aren't proud of. With my*

*background as a nurse it has helped a lot in my training as I already know dental anatomy well; this with good dexterity and attention to detail will hopefully make me a great technician.'*

Sam's hobbies reflect her capacity for tasks requiring good dexterity and her creativity: she enjoys decorating and refurbishing furniture and has tried her hand at jewellery making.

We asked Sam about her fellow students studying dental technology.

*'When the course started, there were 25 students, 11 female. Now we are in second year and have had a first year exam, eight students have continued onto the second year - five of these*

*are female. Many students are studying for their degree after completing the BTEC qualification.'*

We also asked Sam whether she has joint sessions with students studying on other dentistry courses, but she said that the training for dental technology is entirely separate.

**Work-life balance**

While Sam studies full-time to become a dental technician, she also works ad hoc as a dental nurse at Manor Dental Care in Solihull (the location for the photoshoot in this article). She is also looking for a job or placement in a dental lab to gain more hands-on experience.

*'Guidance on our future careers in dental technology is given as part of our degree. We have a professionalism lecture in which we discuss areas in which we can progress such as in maxillofacial or setting up your own lab.'*

*'I would like to work in a lab as a ceramist\* and once I gain enough experience I will start up my own lab.'*

We asked Sam if she would be interested in becoming a clinical dental technician (CDT).

*dentist does everything. If someone has a new set of dentures or a crown, they'll tell everybody what a great dentist they have making their fab new teeth, when the actual construction was carried out by the technician.'*

#### Job satisfaction

Sam lives at home in Coventry with her family and travels to Birmingham each day for lectures. She says that she would definitely recommend her career path to other dental nurses.

*'Becoming a dental technician is a great career progression for a dental nurse as you already know what the appliances are and about dental anatomy etc. Of course, dental technology is a male-dominated profession, as with dentists, but that's changing; there are more female than male dentists these days and the same thing could happen with technicians.'*

*'I think women make good technicians because I think we pay more attention to aesthetics.'*

Sam is currently enjoying the second year of her dental technology degree, and has managed admirably to fit her studies around family life.

*'It's amazing to think that you have created something from scratch just from wax. I do feel very proud when I have completed a piece of work. My children love to see what mummy has been making at college.'*

- \* A dental ceramist is a skilled dental technician who uses start of the art dental materials from scientifically engineered dental ceramics to restore any teeth that are damaged, discoloured or missing.



#### Interview by Kate Quinlan

*Many thanks to Manor Dental Care for hosting the photoshoot for this issue of Vital. As we go to press Sam has just emailed to say that she now has a placement working two days a week in a private lab!*

Manor Dental Care is part of the Smiles Dental Group and is a well established dental practice based in the heart of Solihull. The practice offers a wide range of dental treatments and also facial cosmetic procedures.

For further information visit [www.smiles.co.uk](http://www.smiles.co.uk), pop in to Manor Dental Care, 1 Manor Road, Solihull West Midlands B91 2BH, or contact reception on 0121 705 0667.

*'Yes definitely. I've taken a risk leaving my job as a dental nurse in a practice which I loved working in and going back into education, especially with a young family to support. It's because I've wanted to be a technician for a long time and being so determined to succeed. Now is the right time for me to do it!'*

Sam does think that when she becomes a dental technician, she will miss the patient interaction, as being in a busy dental surgery is very different to being in a small team in a lab.

*'I will also miss the clinical side, especially as I enjoy surgical treatments - but there is the option to do further training as a technician and work in hospitals as a maxillofacial technician. This is something that really appeals to me and definitely an option for the future.'*

Sam thinks that dental technicians are still usually very isolated:

*'Dental technicians have very little to do with the rest of the dental team generally unless it's a more complex case. I think technicians are very much isolated from patients; often patients don't even realise that technicians exist - they think the*

