

'I enjoy being front line with the patients'



Paula Ennis, 45, is a dental nurse and oral health educator at WRE Livingston Dental Health Care at Bangor in County Down.

During the week I get up at 7am, shower, have breakfast and get my son organised for school. My home town is Donaghadee in Co Down, a lovely seaside town where I have lived for 40 years. I usually have cereal or toast with a cup of tea at home before taking my son to the bus stop and heading to work. I am fortunate that I only live six miles from work so it doesn't take long to drive there.

I am married to Mark who is a painter/decorator and we have two children: Hollie who is 18-years-old, has just left school and is hoping to study history at university, and Thomas who is 13-years-old and in year 9 at school.

I work three days a week at the practice at the moment and do one late night a week. My responsibilities include the day to day running of a busy surgery and I have my own oral hygiene session once a week, where I advise patients on their oral health. I have my NEBDN Diploma in Dental Nursing and my Oral Health Education Certificate.

While I was at school I chose to do work experience at the local orthodontic practice as I had attended the surgery a lot while wearing a brace for two years. I thought dental nursing looked like a good, interesting job and the staff were always very nice to me.

After completing my GCSEs at high school I enrolled in a dental nursing course at the local further education college. I studied all aspects of dental nursing and spent time out gaining experience in dental surgeries. I also attended night classes and completed a GCSE then an A-level in sociology.

I always like helping people and how different each day can be; I enjoy meeting

people and am always eager to learn new tasks and challenges, working as an individual or as a team. I also enjoy the responsibility of helping run a busy surgery: setting it up for the day, maintaining dental equipment, responding to requests from the dentist working chairside, decontamination control and reception duties.

I enjoy being front line with the patients, showing them compassion and empathy to help make their dental experience better - especially nervous patients. There is nothing more rewarding than helping someone get over their fears of the dentist or restoring someone's smile, giving them back their confidence and self-esteem.

The most stressful element of my job can be dealing with very nervous patients or patients with complex needs: this requires patience and knowledge and skill in dealing with different individuals and their needs.

In our dental team there are two dentists, three dental nurses, a dental hygienist and an oral health nurse. We see a wide variety of patients of all ages and walks of life including private care, NHS and Denplan care. We as a team work hard to provide a good caring service for all our patients to meet their expectations and dental needs.

As the oral health nurse I go out to different venues to educate people on their oral health. It can be local schools, youth groups or children's play groups, giving out advice and practical help to everyone, hoping that this will help improve their oral health.

We all usually bring our lunch in to work. Lunch is time out to catch up with each other when things are not so busy. If the weather is good we go for a walk to clear our heads.

I am lucky that my boss is very supportive

in regards to CPD; he appreciates it is important for all members of the team and allows us to attend and book courses even if sometimes it requires time off. Most courses are available online or can be attended after work. It is important to keep up to date with recent developments and changes in the dental field enabling us as professionals to gain new knowledge and skills that can be passed on to our patients.

I also help out at the dental nursing examinations that take place several times a year. It is always encouraging to see new students prepare to gain their qualifications to start on their dental career. It takes me back to when I started 27 years ago ... how time flies!

I think if you are busy in work it is very important to have interests and hobbies to do in your free time. I enjoy walking, yoga classes, reading, socialising with friends and family and church life. It is important to let off steam and relax as much as possible and also to take a step back every now and then and appreciate all that you have in life.

I am careful with what my family and I eat. 'Everything in moderation' can be difficult at times with two teenagers in the house but on the whole we try our best to have a healthy balanced diet. I am careful about oral health and try to pass my knowledge and experiences on to my family, ensuring they have a good dental regime.

If I hadn't gone into dentistry I think I would have liked to be a teacher. I enjoy the dental education teaching that I do and also having an influence, however small, on people's oral health.

bdjteam2017153