



From *phobia* to *fanfare*



Ingrid Perry on her journey from dental phobic to recipient of an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for her services to children's oral health

If, 35 years ago you had predicted a career in dentistry, I would have laughed. Seven general anaesthetics for exodontia, numerous restorations and extensive orthodontic treatment which included twin blocks, fixed appliances and head gear, resulted in me being an extremely phobic patient. Dentistry was the last thing I would have considered! If you had gone on to say I would get an honour from the Queen, I would have told you not to be so daft!

I'd always wanted to join the military police, but being just over five feet tall, the height regulations at the time put paid to that idea. After finishing my O Levels, I had no idea what I was going to do. After two months of sixth form, it became clear that further study was not for me. One day I went to the local Youth Training Scheme office to see what they had to offer.

The only positions available were hairdressing, office work and dental nursing. When I went home and told my family I was

going to be a trainee dental nurse they nearly had a heart attack laughing! Little did I know then what a successful career lay ahead.

I became trainee dental nurse at a small practice in Hornsea in Yorkshire in October 1984. When the training course came to an end I secured a position at a much larger practice in Hull where I stayed for four years. I loved working as a dental nurse and the fact the dentist who I was assigned to was extremely forward thinking and was keen to try new techniques, only increased my thirst for knowledge. During this time I enrolled at the local college and gained the National Certificate for Dental Surgery Assistants in 1989.

A position for a dental nurse became available with the Community Dental Service and I applied and was successful. The vast majority of patients we saw were children and pregnant and nursing mothers. We also carried out the school screening service. Another aspect of my role was to assist with general anaesthetic sessions each week where we would frequently provide

clearances for three year old children. I can still recall the feeling in the pit of my stomach as those sessions brought back many unpleasant memories for me.

It was during this time that I was asked to go into a local school to give a presentation to children about looking after their teeth. I had never done anything like this before and the thought of standing up in front of a school assembly of 250 children and their teachers absolutely terrified me. Back then I was not a very confident person, which is probably hard to believe now! My school reports always said "Ingrid is the quietest member of the class and lacks confidence in her abilities", but my manager at the time had promised the school that someone would visit and I didn't want to let him down. After a few sleepless nights, off I went to deliver the presentation. I had no idea then, what impact the presentation would have on me.

The children were very responsive and engaged in the session and my manager, who had come along to observe, was so pleased with



There was clearly a need here but funding was an issue, so my team put together business cases and submitted them to the local PCT's who continued to financially support the programme for the next four years. However, in 2010 it was announced that the PCTs were being dissolved and the programme was in jeopardy of folding. With a colleague, I attended a local dental forum where we presented the programme and asked for help from local practice owners. Thankfully, one practice, the 543 Dental Centre in Hull, came forward and provided £2000 to keep the programme going until we could secure additional funding.

I worked closely with the practice who introduced me to Simon Gambold of Henry Schein and together we persuaded Simon to support the programme by providing the toothbrushes and toothpaste for the programme at a greatly reduced price. He also agreed to support an additional 6 schools in the programme. A further two local dental practices later joined the Brush Bus Partnership.

Several months later we introduced dental assessments and fluoride varnish applications into the programme which increased access to

and events which enables us to share good practice and support others in their bid to reduce the inequalities in child dental health.

In 2014, after working for the CDS for 24 years, I decided it was time for me to leave and I moved to a dental practice to work as practice administrator/team leader. I was responsible for the marketing of the practice, designing leaflets and also undertaking audits and ensuring the practice was compliant. During this time there were occasions where I did assist in the surgery and I recall one dentist saying to me: "I like you, you're old school!"

In 2016 I sent my CV to my dentist and I was appointed as practice manager for a six surgery dental practice in Bridlington. I was extremely proud when my practice was awarded "notable practice" in October 2017 by the CQC.

In May 2018 I moved practices and I now manage a ten surgery practice in Hull. I never imagined I would ever be a practice manager as my heart always lay in dental public health, but I can honestly say I absolutely love my job and no two days are ever the same.

In recent years I have taken a bit of a back seat with Teeth Team, but I have continued to

how the session had gone that he suggested I consider becoming an oral health educator.

So I enrolled on another course of study, this time the Royal Society of Health Certificate in Oral Health Education and I qualified in 1991. I spent the next 20 years delivering oral health education in local schools and providing training for carers in residential homes, school nursing and health visiting teams and other agencies involved in health and social care.

In 2006, whilst visiting a local primary school in a severely socially deprived area, the head teacher said she was concerned about the number of children taking time off school due to toothache. At the time, the Childsmile programme in Scotland had just started in nurseries and we chatted about how we could possibly adapt the Childsmile programme so that it would work in a primary school setting with much larger volumes of children. The team I was working with developed a plan. We ran a pilot and it worked wonderfully. The children would brush their teeth each day when they returned to the classroom after the lunchtime break. Parents were involved in a consultation process and had the opportunity to raise any concerns they had. Word soon got out and other schools contacted us to see if they too could join the programme. Within a very short time we had approximately 15 schools taking part in a programme which was known as the Brush Bus.

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dental care for these vulnerable children. The benefits of the programme were clear for all to see. The dental health of the children began to improve, as did their school attendance which impacted positively on their educational attainment. Unfortunately in 2013, the CDS decided they could no longer support the programme and withdrew from the Partnership. Naturally, I was disappointed but I continued to support it on my days off.

The programme grew from strength to strength and in 2013 we decided to change the name of the programme to "Teeth Team". Over the following years we won several awards including "Best Child Dental Health Initiative-DH&T awards 2014, Patron's Prize for innovation – NOHPG and the Outstanding Innovation Award-BSPD. I also was a finalist at the Dental Awards for Oral Health Promoter of the Year 2013 and a finalist in the Hull Women of Achievement Awards in 2012 and 2014.

Over the years I have represented Teeth Team and have delivered presentations at conferences

support the programme in my capacity as the Secretary for the charity and I occasionally deliver presentations at conferences, such as the BSPD Annual Conference which was held in September 2017 in Manchester when Teeth Team was awarded Outstanding Innovation Award (pictured).

I am very proud of my achievements as a DCP, but I was nevertheless incredibly shocked when I learned I was to be recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. I have received some wonderful letters and messages of congratulations for my MBE from many highly respected professionals, including Sara Hurley, CDO for England, whose very kind comments were particularly heart warming.

Who knows what lies ahead of me! Potentially I have another 15 years until retirement. I would like to think during this time I will continue to be the best I can be and help others to achieve the same.

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