

‘Helping people smile is a huge part of my job’



Newly qualified dental hygienist **Paula Gontowicz**, who came to the UK from Poland in 2012, talks about her passion for her role, her motivations and aspirations.

Tell us a bit about your background Paula and how you ended up as a dental hygienist?

I have always had an interest in orthodontics from a very early age. When I was a teenager I had a lot of dental work done. Until I had had my braces I didn't have the confidence to smile. There is a huge lack of education around oral hygiene and diet so I also had a number of fillings!

I came to the UK from Poland in my gap year in 2012 and then I decided I loved it here so much that I wanted to stay. My mother is a pharmacist and it was naturally assumed that I would follow in her footsteps,

but I felt my motivation lay within a dental career rather than a

pharmacy based one so I applied to train as a dental nurse. Helping people smile is now a huge part of my job!

So how did you end up in your current role?

When I was a student dental nurse I was head hunted by one of the directors at Smilepod [a London-based chain of dental studios offering easy access to dental and dental hygiene treatment] so I moved to the Bank branch in July 2014. I was GDC registered in April 2015 after which I was made the lead dental nurse for the Bank studio. I thought it was going to be really awkward as I had already applied to go on dental hygienist training in the September at the Eastman Dental Education Centre but in fact the company



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were really supportive and let me work the odd Saturday as and when my studies allowed so I could help fund my continuing education.

As my hygienist training was nearing completion I was asked to apply for a hygienist role within the Smilepod group. I did so and am currently working in the Soho studio following completion of my training in August 2017.

How did you find the training?

I really enjoyed it. I was fortunate enough to be the recipient of the Carol Chivers Memorial Award (a memorial award given annually to a student hygienist who has demonstrated the most desirable attributes in theoretical knowledge and practical skills with patients). It was obviously difficult financially as studying is never cheap but it was worth it in the long term.

You mentioned autonomy. Is autonomy important to you?

Absolutely! The great thing about my job is that there is such a huge element of involvement in patient care. I am able to advise and advocate as well as treat patients without the need for them to have been referred by a dentist prior to their treatment. In fact it is not unusual for a patient who hasn't visited a dentist in years to come into our studios for a cleaning treatment as they are worried about stained teeth and although I can only advise I often can tell them other concerns that I think would benefit from a dental visit (in turn the dentists will direct patients to me so it works well).

Where do you see yourself in the future?

Hang on a minute, I only started this role in August! I have been fortunate enough to be involved in some education sessions in schools

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What do you enjoy about your role?

I love the team here at Smilepod. They are all very positive and supportive. Even though we are based across six different sites we are a young group who regularly meet up for team building and socials. All of our studios are modern and cheerful (the disposables are all pink and purple) and although we have the autonomy of our own workloads

we work very much as a team. For

example if I have a patient who

is also seeing a periodontist I

am able to schedule time in

explaining to that patient what

their treatment will entail and as

we all know each other well I can tell them

a bit about the person treating them so they

feel at ease. I also enjoy the hustle and bustle

of Soho and the variety of patients we have

coming through the doors.

teaching children about oral hygiene and diet and going forward that is something I would like to do more of. I have a keen interest in periodontal work so who knows, maybe I will look at getting into the dentistry field and gain experience in a hospital setting one day or even run my own studio. In the meantime I will concentrate on educating my patients and creating confidence in their smiles.

Outside of work where would we find you?

I live just outside London in Kingston and whilst I love the vibrancy of London and the buzz that goes with it I also like escaping to the forests for walks and quiet time in the fresh air. I also love socialising, movies and going on motorcycle rides (I used to own a Vespa and I love that feeling of freedom) as well as being a keen photographer.

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