



For the *love* of dental nursing

Lynsey Blackburn, 44, is a dental nurse in Sunderland, mother of two and passionate about oral health education.

I get up at 7 am every day - I like to be up early to get everybody organised for the day. I'm married with two daughters, Ella who is 18, and Eve who is 13, and they are my absolute world. There's usually only myself and my youngest daughter around at breakfast time so we tend to sit together and watch morning TV while eating our porridge. With a busy day in surgery ahead I find it's the only thing that fills me up and keeps me going till lunch time.

I'm originally from Nottingham but have lived in Sunderland for nearly 20 years and love it! The people are so friendly and I live five minutes from the coast so enjoy lots of beach walks after a long day in surgery, which is a great way to relax. I'm still in touch with lots of friends from Nottingham so I get to visit my hometown quite often.

After dropping off the youngest at school I head off to work to start at 8.30 am. My employers are T. T. and M. Brown and I work four days a week. I don't live far from the practice but it's about a 15 minute drive through busy traffic.

In the morning we get 30 minutes to set the surgery up for the day, clean down, check the daylists and replenish any low stock. The most important job of the day is making sure both myself and the dentist have a decent cup of tea!

We see our first patient at 9 am and stop for lunch at 12; it's a busy NHS practice and we mostly do standard NHS treatments (fillings, root treatments, extractions).

There are ten members in our dental team: three dentists, four dental nurses, two receptionists and a practice manager. We often sit together at lunchtime with the full team and eat our lunches while catching up with each other; we are often so busy during the day that we don't get chance to have any conversation, so it's nice to sit and have a proper chat.

Lunch finishes at 1 pm and we see patients straight through until 4.30 pm. We then have 30 minutes to close down the surgeries and make sure all the instruments are sterilised and bagged for the next day.

I got into dentistry purely by accident. I actually wanted to be a midwife but after leaving sixth form I realised I needed more than just pocket money so I applied for a dental assistant position. I was lucky enough to get the first job I went for and began my career in a large NHS practice in Nottingham, in 1991. It was really hard work and I remember for the first week coming home and falling asleep in my uniform! I worked for a lovely man who I was slightly terrified of... he worked two surgeries at the same time so

as a nurse you had to be very organised and quick on your feet.

I left that practice after four years and moved to another NHS practice which was closer for me; I stayed there for three years and gained my qualification (the National Certificate in dental nursing). I then moved to a completely private practice which I absolutely loved; it was so different to NHS practice and the pace was much slower. I worked with a fantastic team and the boss was a complete inspiration to me. He was so enthusiastic about everything and it really gave me the confidence to be a better dental nurse.

I left to move to Sunderland after working in private practice for four years and have worked in NHS dentistry ever since. I can honestly say I still love my job.

I love working with nervous patients; I like to think I totally empathise with them and help them get through their treatment as smoothly as possible. I also love working with children; I'm a real advocate for making their visits as happy and 'normal' as possible. Lots of parents tend to programme fear of the dentist into their children without knowing it so trying to make it as positive as possible is a great start to their dental visits.

I work in quite a high needs area of Sunderland so the decay rate is relatively high. Trying to educate these patients are my most challenging moments. When these patients return on a regular basis and improve their dental health it makes my job worthwhile.

I have completed the fluoride application course but as yet had no chance to use it in



'I CAN SEE MYSELF IN A FEW YEARS DRIVING

AROUND IN A TOOTH-EMBLAZONED MINIBUS

PREACHING TO SCHOOL CHILDREN TO BRUSH

TWICE A DAY WITH A FLUORIDE TOOTHPASTE!'

practice. It's such a shame as the extended duties a dental nurse can carry out these days were just a dream for us nurses in the 1990s!

I get home about 5.30 pm and catch up with the family over tea. I spend most weekends with my daughters and husband Allan walking our dog Bessie and having lunch and catch up with friends. I'm a real home bird; my partying days are behind me and I'm more than happy to snuggle up on the sofa with a good film and glass of wine.

My eldest daughter leaves for university this year so I'm trying to squeeze in as much time

as possible with her. We are planning a girly trip to Dublin at some point before she goes so I'm excited for that.

I still have plans for my career. I would love to work within a hospital setting or within oral health promotion. I can see myself in a few years driving around in a tooth-emblazoned minibus preaching to school children to brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste!

I may have wanted to be a midwife originally but I honestly wouldn't swap my career now: I love being a dental nurse.

Would you like to share your career story or 'day in the life' with the readers of *BDJ Team*? All dental team members welcome. Please send a few details about yourself to bdjteam@nature.com or send a message via the *BDJ Team* Facebook page at www.facebook.com/bdjteam.

For more inspirational career stories and interviews, visit the archive on the *BDJ Team* website.

bdjteam201870