

# Nowhere else I'd rather be

As a research dental nurse at Sheffield's Charles Clifford Dental Hospital, every day is different for **Katy d'Apice**.

## An introduction

Katy d'Apice works in different departments to support various clinical projects - one day she could be in the oral surgery department, the next in paediatrics and the next she could be out on the road, visiting families. 'It's very varied, which is why I love it. I cannot imagine myself doing anything else.'

It's tempting, but fanciful, to think dental nursing is in her genes. Her mum Heather is also a dental nurse working at the same

hospital and her grandmother was a dental nurse in Sheffield. But as Katy is working in the field of genetic research, she understands only too well that if inheritance plays a part, it's only inherited attitudes. While her Mum, who loved being a dental nurse was undoubtedly an influence, Katy has also influenced her mum. Until 14 years ago, Heather was working in the community dental service but when she saw how happy Katy was, she sought out a job for herself at the Charles Clifford Dental Hospital. She is now lead nurse in the restorative department.

One of Katy's current projects - a study led out of Leeds Dental Institute - is research to understand the role that DNA plays in the condition Amelogenesis Imperfecta (AI). The condition affects the development of enamel and can impact on quality of life, especially when it's on the front teeth. Working with her colleague, Rachel Marsden, Katy goes out to the homes of families to collect saliva samples. By going to a patient's home, it's much easier to get parents and siblings involved in the research.

Katy and Rachel take tubes with them and invite everyone in the family of the affected patient to 'drool' into it. This is the purest form of saliva and in order to obtain it, Rachel talks about food to stimulate drooling while

Katy supervises consent forms and sealing of tubes to take back to the lab. Katy is also trained as a phlebotomist and often takes blood in the hospital, whether from patients in the oral medicine department or patients with oral cancer.

A big part of Katy's role is recruiting patients to clinical trials. This is never a difficulty, she says: 'I think patients want to do anything they can. I don't have to persuade people to participate in research. A few people say no and that's the end of it but the rest say yes, they don't even listen to what's involved. They want to help. Patients are great here.'

Read on to learn more about Katy's working life and why being a research dental nurse is a rewarding role.

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*Tell me about your background - how and when you became a dental nurse?*

After leaving school and working in retail, a position for a trainee dental nurse became available at the Charles Clifford Dental Hospital Sheffield Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. My mum had been a dental nurse in the community dental service for 20 years and loved her job. I researched the hospital and all the departments and realised

### Profile: Katy d'Apice

*Katy d'Apice is a research dental nurse at Charles Clifford Dental Hospital Sheffield Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.*

how diverse the treatments were, I thought it was something I would enjoy and what I was looking for. I was offered a training post and passed the NVQ Level 3 in Dental Nursing in 2004. I decided I wanted to stay at the dental hospital and was successful at gaining a position as a dental nurse in the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS) department.

*Tell me about role at dental hospital and how you had become involved in research?*

I had been working within the OMFS department for 8 years and felt I needed a new challenge. A seconded Research Dental Nurse position was advertised to help run a clinical trial within the Oral Medicine and OMFS department on an international multicentre randomised controlled trial (RCT). I thought this would be a great opportunity to develop my skills and learn about clinical trials.

Whilst working on this study other clinical trials were set up in the Charles Clifford Dental Hospital and I helped recruit and nurse for these. Ten years later I am still involved in research and have a permanent contract. I have worked at the hospital for the last 15 years and I would not want to work anywhere else.

*Can you give me examples of research projects you have been involved with and what you had to do?*

I have worked on a variety of research studies, from observational studies to drug studies, supporting research across all dental specialities.

Typical studies include:

- Going out to secondary schools to test in a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) whether a lesson and text messages about tooth brushing reduces tooth decay in pupils
- Testing a new treatment for Oral Lichen Planus using an oral patch coated with a medicine to see if this reduces the symptoms.

My role involves helping to identify patients suitable for the studies, talking to the patients about what is involved, obtaining informed consent, recording data and organising sample collection. I am responsible for the ethical management of the studies, maintaining protocol and 'Good Clinical Practice' requirements.

*Can you tell me the most rewarding piece of research you have been involved in and why?*

In Sheffield we have developed and tested the first self-help guides for children who are scared of the dentist. The guides are called

'Your teeth, you are in control!' This project has applied the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy to try to improve children's experiences of going to the dentist but also to reduce the number of children who need general anaesthetics. It was been really rewarding to see this research through from the early stages of planning and patient and public involvement, from designing the guides, to using them on the clinic and now to see them being used across the UK and even being translated in lots of different languages. I've heard some really lovely comments from child patients and their parents about how useful the guides have been to them so it's a very positive piece of research for all involved. The online versions of the guides are available at: <http://www.dental.lltff.com>



Katy helps a patient with a research project consent form

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*How important to patients do you think research is?*

I think research is really important and the patients I see every day enjoy being part of a study. They want to try new procedures that will not just benefit them but others in the future, even if this is just donating a few millimetres of saliva. Patients want to see advances in healthcare and without research studies, this will not happen.

*How do you feel about this aspect of your work? Is it something you enjoy?*

I really enjoy my job, it is both rewarding and challenging. No two days are the same, our studies do not just run at the dental hospital but out in schools and I often go to patients' homes to recruit the whole family. There is a lot of variety.

*Sheffield has been pioneering in the field of patient centred research. Do*

*you think that this is something that will develop further?*

The research at Sheffield has always put patients at the heart of projects. We have a number of patient advisory panels including our own oral and dental panel which meets 4-6 times per year to share their views on all our research from laboratory studies to clinical trials.

*Would you encourage other dental nurses to get involved in research?*

Yes, it is a really worthwhile job and gives great job satisfaction. It is amazing to run studies with new devices/drugs that deliver new and innovative treatments and improve on existing treatments. Getting involved with research is a good career if you want to develop as a dental nurse learning new skills whilst maintaining patient contact and care.

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