

'I've always had a passion for delivering oral health care'



Emma Clayton, 33, is a dental therapist for three practices in Yorkshire and also delivers professional oral care training for carers. Emma graduated from the University of Sheffield in 2013 and is married with a 2-year-old boy called Max and an energetic boxer dog called Joey.

Early ambitions

Growing up there were many routes I had considered; after work experience in a few schools I considered primary school teaching as I enjoyed education. After GCSEs I went on to study A-levels including Health and Social Care; this then led me to an interest in nursing or midwifery. Unfortunately, I was rejected from a university to study paediatric nursing, so I entered my profession in dentistry starting out as a dental nurse in the first instance.

A job offer came up to become a trainee dental nurse in my local area which I took in the hope that one day I would progress my career and go to university. I love meeting new people and feel like one of my skills is being good at communicating and 'reading' people, so dental nursing was the ideal job role for me, and I loved it. I knew that I wanted to be in the care/health industry and work as part of a team.

I was a dental nurse for seven years during which I also studied and achieved my Dental Radiography qualification before applying to study dental hygiene and dental therapy at university.

Going to uni

There were approximately 28 places on the DipHE Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy course at Sheffield University so it was extremely competitive. When I found out I had got a place I felt extremely proud and privileged to have

this amazing opportunity. I worked hard for the interview, preparing for months, whilst also trying to gain a grade C resitting GCSE Maths as I knew I couldn't get in without this (anyone who knows me will be aware that Maths is certainly not my strong point). This was my biggest challenge of the whole process, I put my everything into getting that grade.

My family were amazingly supportive at the time. I had just got my first house with my now-husband so we knew that financially it was going to put a massive strain on him. But with the help of parents and friends, we made it through.

If I said the course at Sheffield University was easy I would be lying. There were days when I cried and wondered if I had made a mistake as I found both the commuting daily and the workload sometimes very overwhelming. I made some amazing friends (who I still keep in touch with now) who helped me get by. We had study groups and one of my friends often let me stay so I didn't have to commute as often. As much as the workload could often be difficult, I loved learning new skills and found one of the most exciting parts was the outreach programme where we were given three placements to work in. I gained valuable experience within a dental access centre and community working with some amazing tutors who shared their knowledge and skills.

When I graduated I couldn't believe it; it felt like a dream. There were happy tears from

everyone and I felt so lucky to be on that stage in front of everyone I care about, receiving the diploma that I had worked so hard for. It was one of the most memorable days of my life. It was also exciting to show my family and friends round the city where I had spent so much time over the past two and a half years, a city which will now always be close to my heart.

After graduation

As there were no vocational training places around my area, after graduating I went straight into work. I was very lucky however and was taken on by a practice that does vocational training for dentists, so I had amazing support from my boss and work colleagues who helped me build my confidence.

There are a lot of aspects of working as a dental therapist that are similar to being a dental nurse, such as time keeping, reading patients, reassuring nervous and anxious patients, keeping good notes and working as a team. Treating patients as a dental therapist, however, is of course very different as I now carry out clinical procedures instead of assisting with them. I find both jobs rewarding but in very different ways.

I'm lucky that I am able to carry out most of my full scope within the three practices I work at. The only thing I would say I haven't done much of is paediatric treatments, which I'm hoping with time I will be able to expand my

knowledge in by attending a hands-on course and rebuilding my confidence.

I know there are many dental therapists working out there who have no access to a dental nurse. I am extremely lucky in this respect and am so grateful for all of the dental nurses I work with; they have all been amazing and work so hard to keep things running smoothly as well as providing extra support for patients in the chair. Without them my job would be so much more difficult.

Since graduation I have worked hard to build my confidence. I am continually attending courses and expanding my knowledge, keeping up to date. I have worked in both NHS and private practices and work alongside dentists who deliver complex treatments such as sedation, endodontic procedures and implants. I have been out into the community (something I love) delivering education to school children on the importance of oral health. I have also done some promotion work for Oral-B in a Boots superstore and more recently have started working for KOHC [Knowledge Oral Healthcare], an organisation that trains carers of the elderly and disabilities.

- Oral health and systemic health
- Palliative care
- Challenging behaviours
- Diet and sugars
- Basic anatomy of the oral cavity
- Coping strategies for tooth brushing
- Oral health assessments
- Oral care policies
- Dementia care.

Training is delivered via a power presentation in the form of either an A3 flip chart or an overhead projector. We give out oral health assessment forms, training packs and leaflets that may be of use, and also samples for carers to try. I've found carers extremely receptive to the training and most of them make it a fun, interactive session. They are all extremely grateful for the training as may have had no previous sessions. Managers have often contacted me to arrange repeat and further training.

My training role is extremely rewarding; both staff and inspectors/managers have noticed a difference in residents' oral care since I have trained their carers. It is nice to know that I can



Graduation day

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Training carers

I've always had a passion for delivering oral health care and think education is essential, prevention being the key to good oral health; that's why I think this type of work is well suited to me and I absolutely love it.

Whilst on maternity leave in 2017 I approached Jane, the founder of KOHC. My role within KOHC involves visiting care homes of the elderly and those with disabilities and educating the staff on oral care. We provide a 2-hour training session to the care staff, which also goes over policies, oral health assessments on new residents, and CQC guidance. I conduct the training every time there's a care home in my local area that asks for someone to go in and deliver it. I carry out the training on my own for up to 12 carers.

Within the training for carers we cover:

make a difference and make residents feel more comfortable.

Work-life balance

One thing I have always been good at is time management and organising my work/social life (I have a slight obsession with stationery and diaries, especially from Paperchase!) I try to balance my time between family and work and always make the most of days off, rarely being at home and always exploring new things/areas and places of interest.

I'm normally home around tea time since having Max and shortening my days at work as I like to enjoy time with him before bedtime. Evenings are mostly spent with the family or running with friends. I've also started looking for courses in mindfulness as this is something I would like to practise more. I think it's

important to take time out and relax from the hectic world we live in.

Regarding my upcoming plans, working more out in the community is something I would definitely look at and I'm hoping to deliver more training with KOHC. I'm also looking at furthering my career, looking at new avenues of dentistry.

Although it was relatively slow to get into work five years ago when I first qualified, more and more opportunities have since arisen. I've expanded my skills as a dental therapist but also been able to take on new challenges, which I would have not been given the opportunity to do had it not been for venturing into this career.

With my own family, I strive to be careful with sugar consumption. My son only drinks milk and water and I've been fortunate that he's not been introduced to juice through nursery/friends as yet. I make sure he visits the dentist every 6/12 months which I've done right from birth as I think it's important to familiarise children with the dental environment from a young age. I've now got the majority of my family using interdental aids and most of them now use an electric toothbrush.

The three things I could not live without are coffee (to keep me awake after those nights when Max is teething), stationery (to keep me organised), and my phone (I love to keep in touch with friends who are long distance).

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