

# The mummy influencers



In the second part of her series, **Caroline**

**Holland** profiles dentists who are working as influencers to improve children's oral health.

**W**hatever you think about influencers, they are a reality of twenty-first century life. But it's not all handbags, make-up and shoes. Influencers can have a positive role and promote fitness, nutrition and mindfulness. More recently, a new category of influencer has emerged and they are parents working in dentistry who want to have an impact on dental health.

Among the first on the scene was Claire Stevens. She tells the story of how she created a new online persona, The Tooth Fairy.

'My blog was born six years ago out of frustration. On that day I had probably seen

20 patients requiring extractions and the last child was being brought up on a diet of sweet biscuits and fruit drinks.

'There has to be a better way,' I told myself.

I wrote my first blog post on the train on the way back from my working day in Manchester. It was called: "How do you not get holes in your child's teeth?" I posted it onto a swiftly assembled WordPress site before I went to sleep. When I woke up the next morning, around 1,000 people across the globe had viewed my blog and some of them were reaching out to me. I was astounded. I suppose at the time nobody else was doing the same thing. My style is not to be judgemental but to share information and my own experiences. I know how difficult it can be as a Mum. Feedback is mostly from grateful parents who are relieved that I am not being "preachy".

Claire continues: "The blog has been invaluable in making contacts with colleagues around the globe who share the same concerns. I also recognise that with each blog I reach many hundreds more people than I can see on a working day or in a working week, for that matter."

Offline Claire has also been influential, partly through her iconic jar of teeth (pictured in this article) which she took with her onto BBC Breakfast's red sofa. All of the teeth were extracted in one session, and 16 belonged to a

two-year-old. Influencers need to have an eye for imagery, especially if they are operating on Instagram. It is a very popular site with parents and therefore a natural platform for any dental team who wants to influence how they wean and feed their babies.

Among those who are very active on Instagram is Jemma Hook, aka @themummydentist. She works in general practice in Liverpool as an NHS family dentist and also as a clinical teacher in Paediatric Dentistry. She started her Instagram account whilst on maternity leave last year to promote oral health and also to find support in the chat about breastfeeding, weaning and sleep deprivation!

Jemma explains: 'I am passionate about providing accessible and practical advice centred on current evidence-based UK guidelines. Using Instagram has allowed me to engage with a large audience for simple oral health promotion and raise awareness of campaigns such as Dental Check by 1. I have collaborated with numerous other accounts and especially enjoyed integrating tooth care for young babies with nutritional advice alongside hot topics such as weaning.

'New motherhood can sometimes be an isolating time and I found connections through the wonderful "instamum" community unique compared to other platforms. And I like to mix it up: using both



Claire Stevens of The Tooth Fairy blog



Claire Stevens' iconic jar of extracted teeth



Helen Clint, also known as @dentalmummy

my main posts and the stories facility to share a blend of OH advice and practical tips diluted with real mum life.'

Also busy on Instagram and based in Liverpool is Helen Clint, @dentalmummy. As young Mums and dentists, they share the same philosophy but express it through different personas. They don't want to be paid but they do want to 'put back'. Instagram is the perfect place, they believe, because it's where young Mums are active and it's ideal for short and powerful posts. Parents are reaching out to them and asking for advice on a range of issues, often around teething and weaning.

Helen has worked in the same dental practice since qualifying 14 years ago. She works part-time as an associate and she is an Educational Supervisor. She became active on Instagram after becoming involved in a Clinical Entrepreneur Programme. 'I stumbled across the programme by chance after searching online on the topic of innovation in the NHS. As a pregnant woman who still had to carry around my notes I was amazed that technology wasn't moving resources online. But after being on the programme I have realised that implementation of technology across the NHS isn't as straightforward!

'I didn't want to waste the opportunity I had been given so I decided to explore social media to try and build a brand and undertake some educational projects.

'Dentists are often perceived as out of touch and I wanted to change this perception. What I want to do is educate and empower parents and caregivers to make healthier choices for their children (and themselves too!).

'I aim to influence people by promoting positive behaviour changes such as using appropriate fluoride toothpastes, reducing the

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amount and frequency of sugar consumption and visiting a dentist regularly.

'It's amazing how many parents and caregivers don't know some of our basic oral health messages and to me that's not a reflection of their parenting but more a reflection of how our message isn't always landing with the right people at the right time.

'We have recently moved house to a property that requires renovating so that doesn't leave me with much "spare" time to run my account and write my blogs! I have to do lots of the work, like most mums do, when the children have gone to bed, or in the mornings before they wake up. I also find myself sacrificing lunchtimes at work too! But I have been fortunate to be in a position to give something back, and I am passionate to try and improve children's oral health. I don't want to be an influencer but social media gives me a great platform to spread a preventative message far

and wide. I have had positive feedback from followers who have told me that my account has inspired them to make changes so that makes it all worthwhile!

For the first part of this series, *The power of the influencer* (October 2019), visit <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41407-019-0174-7>.



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<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41407-019-0187-2>