

Are you considering your career options?



Julie Deverick¹ discusses the move from dental nursing to dental hygiene and dental therapy.

Essayist, lecturer, philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once famously said that 'Life is a journey, not a destination', and when it comes to achieving your career goals this couldn't be truer – particularly in dentistry.

Unlike some professions, dentistry offers the opportunity for both lateral and vertical career progression, which can be achieved via a number of pathways. To enter into dental hygiene and dental therapy, for instance, it is not necessary to take the direct route.

Author information

¹Julie is the new President of the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BSDHT) and has over 30 years' experience as a dental hygienist. She originally trained with the Royal Army Dental Corps then spent 22 years honing her skills which combined clinical and military duties. She eventually became a Principal Tutor and gained the Certificate of Education. She has been involved with the BSDHT Executive Committee since 2013 and continues to work in practice.

In fact, it is not uncommon for dental nurses to move from dental nursing into dental hygiene or dental therapy to explore a new avenue of their career, with many opting to make the change once they've gained the necessary experience. It is, after all, a natural progression given that dental nurses are already familiar with working with all team members to provide patient care. Plus, the skills learnt are completely transferable - not just the clinical knowledge - but those pertaining to communication and dealing with anxious patients too.

It is for these reasons that a number of universities actually prefer applicants to have previous dental nursing experience – though it is important to note that this is not a prerequisite in all cases. Nevertheless, the advantages of holding a dental nurse qualification before entering into dental hygiene and dental therapy cannot be undervalued. The question remains, then: what is the pathway that a dental nurse needs to take in order to become a dental hygienist or dental therapist?

Training and courses

There are currently 21 schools in the UK offering dental hygiene and dental therapy training, most of which provide a joint qualification, though it is possible to do one or the other as a standalone course. Depending on the course chosen, training can last anywhere between two to four years. The options are as follows:

1. Diploma in Dental Hygiene – two-year full-time course
2. Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Therapy – 27-month full-time course
3. BSc in Oral Health Science – three-year full-time course
4. BSc (Hons) in Oral Health Sciences (Edinburgh) – four-year course (please note this is the only four-year Honours degree in this subject in the UK).

Entry requirements

As for the qualifications needed to successfully apply for one of these courses, the requirements will very much depend on the course and school being applied to. The latter in particular can make a difference as what one school expects may not necessarily be true for another. Generally, though, there are some basic expectations. A prospective applicant, for instance, will always need a minimum of five to six GCSEs grade A to C, including English,

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Maths and often double Science. Two to three A-levels at grade C or above are also typically required – one of which must be Biology and most will not accept Critical Thinking or General

accept them. Alternatively, some schools will accept an Access to Higher Education Diploma (60 credits) or BTEC National Diploma.

Get the right support

Of course, the journey to becoming a qualified dental hygienist or dental therapist is about more than qualifications – it’s about having access to the right information and resources so that you are able to make the transition smoothly and seamlessly. Backing and encouragement from an employer in gaining the necessary skills is always extremely beneficial, as is support from a trusted organisation that represents your best interests as a dental professional. That applies once qualified too.

BSDHT

It can be quite daunting embarking on a new chapter in your career, which is why it can help to have the support of a representative that understands what the role entails. That’s where the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BSDHT) comes in. With 70 years’ experience of supporting dental professionals, the BSDHT strives to provide guidance, CPD opportunities and news to all members to help them stay informed and fully represented within the profession. With their help, navigating the world of dental hygiene and dental therapy can be a more rewarding and exciting experience from the very first step.

If you’re thinking of taking the leap from dental nursing to the realms of dental hygiene or dental therapy, begin your journey today. For more information about the BSDHT, visit www.bsdht.org.uk.

Studies. However, where the applicant holds a Level 3 Dental Nurse qualification, some places will accept either one A-level or two nationally recognised Post Qualification Certificates in their place – so again, there are options.

Educational equivalence

If A-levels are an issue, there are a number of Post Qualification Certificates available to dental nurses, including Dental Sedation Nursing, Oral Health Education, Orthodontic Nursing, Special Care Nursing and Dental Implant Nursing. As long as the courses are accredited by the National Examining Board for Dental Nurses or the British Dental Association, they can be used in lieu of A-levels where schools

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