'A natural finish is so much nicer'

©Image credit/ Getty Images Plus

A day in the life [pre-lockdown] of **Luke Anthony Snelling**, 31, a dental hygienist and therapist and facial aesthetician living in Rayleigh, Essex.

I usually get up at 6.30 am. My clinic (DHA) is around a 20-minute drive (roughly four miles) and my other surgeries are a 30-minute drive, although I get the train to Billericay on a Monday: a stress-free journey.

For breakfast I have become very lazy and have a protein shake in the car on the way to work. With my clinic starting off slowly as it's new, it has allowed me to have breakfast mid-morning after arrival, which varies from fruit and yoghurt to porridge with Redbush tea! I

usually drive and get the train – previously I had more local work and used to walk which I miss so much – there is nothing like fresh air!

We opened Dental Health and Aesthetics in November 2019 so it is very new. It was a concept idea I had many moons ago but I never had the confidence to give up work and give it a go. Finally, I found the courage and went for it: I turned the clinic idea into a reality. My role is clinical director and managing director, treating dental patients and providing facial aesthetic treatments alongside our beauty therapists.

I work Monday to Saturday every week. I commit full 8-8 hours Tuesdays and Wednesdays at DHA and alternate Fridays 9-5, and I work every Saturday 9-5 too. I work at St Andrews carrying out dental hygiene on a Monday 8.30-5 and Hatfield Peverel doing the same on a Thursday and alternate Fridays 8-5.30. I still do 1-2 days a week dental therapy at Braintree dental care as well, to keep my dental therapy skillset up.

Due to the heavy dental influence within my family I can't think of a moment where

I didn't want to be in dentistry. My uncle is a retired dentist and part of the LDC. Another uncle is currently working as a dental technician; and my mum was a practice manager and dental nurse and now works for me at DHA.

I started off wanting to be a dental technician, then after completing my foundation year went into dental nursing to allow me to apply for dental hygiene and therapy. After four years of working within the industry I found myself taking a foundation Botox and filler course and since then I have taken on many more courses to cement my skill set.

My uncle had huge job satisfaction and did very well for himself. I looked up to him and wanted to achieve what he had and that was the main appeal. I liked the idea of a skill and trade for longevity – everyone needs dentistry!

Dental hygiene and therapy was my mum's idea after my year of training to be a dental technician. I never excelled at dental technology and hated not having contact with patients. I thrive on being able to

Author information

Luke works at Dental Health and Aesthetics (DHA), Leigh on Sea as clinical director, carrying out dental hygiene and therapy treatments and facial aesthetic treatments. He also works at Hatfield Peverel Dental Surgery and St Andrews Billericay as a dental hygienist.

communicate with patients - I'm a sociable person.

Following this I had never thought about aesthetics until my bosses at The Smile Centre in Rayleigh wanted me to go into facial aesthetics. This turned out to be an amazing opportunity and I found myself doing well and achieving fantastic results.

I had full orthodontic treatment as a patient when I was younger and, with my mum being a dental nurse and practice manager for my uncles, regular hygiene appointments.

I love treating children. I would have loved to have done more paediatric dentistry and fortunately I do a small amount now within dental therapy, but nowhere near enough.

The routine hygiene maintenance patient is a regular of mine, followed by the facial aesthetics patient who is nervous about treatment but wanting everything done at once!

I would say within dentistry the tide has changed towards aesthetic dentistry. Composite bonding and whitening is high up within the dental aspect as an alternative to veneers.

Since opening the clinic, it has allowed me to carry out this type of treatment more freely. I always make sure patients are dentally fit before starting treatment journeys, therefore hygiene is paramount and a referral to a dentist for routine check-ups and any treatment needed outside my remit. With facial aesthetics I do a lot of lip fillers and toxin treatments, mainly the upper third of the face. I have tailored my lip filler approach and it seems to be popular within the area.

The clientele at DHA in Leigh-On-Sea is a younger age group compared to my other practices. The mentality towards dental health and facial aesthetics is similar throughout. The type of patient I attract with my treatment tends to be people wanting subtle natural changes anyway.

Dental hygiene seems to be the same for me, although with direct access you get more patients who haven't been in for many years so it's slightly more challenging!

I enjoy the day to day challenges of my role. I find it frustrating when patients ignore health advice or post-operative instructions, especially with facial aesthetics treatment. It always affects treatment outcomes and opinions. It is a challenge managing patient expectations, but a challenge I enjoy. It's all about building trust. Dental hygiene will always be a rollercoaster but with maintenance patients it starts to become easier to control.

My career ambition is to have a successful clinic (or two!), known for safe and effective treatment. I would love to teach, in either dental or facial aesthetics. I also want to help take on the dental therapy remit and make it easier for us to work, as currently we are very restricted with prescription laws. I am about to start my level 7 qualification and will take that onto a masters in facial aesthetics. I can't wait to learn more, become more confident and master techniques.

'It is a challenge managing patient expectations, but a challenge I enjoy.'

'It's all about building trust. Dental hygiene will always be a rollercoaster but with maintenance patients it starts to become easier to control.'

Leigh-On-Sea is such a lovely area. Old Leigh is great. Being by the sea is always a plus. Unfortunately, I never make the most of this. I tend to go to the gym at lunch but I am hoping in future when the clinic grows and we get more staff that we can make the most of this as a clinic.

We have a very small team at the moment. This will grow and if there is one thing I have learnt is important over the 15 years of being in dental, it is staff morale. I will insist we socialise!

I am very social. I have a huge circle of friends fortunately and try to see them as much as I can in all capacities (sport or going out), much to the annoyance of my girlfriend. So, to make up for this we go out regularly, to London and locally. Family roasts on a Sunday are a must and my sister lives down the road so I can't avoid her!

I play a lot of football, cricket in the summer and go to the gym weekly. I also play the piano so finding time to practise is tough. Late nights don't help and I don't often have enough time over lunch; with the clinic being new I have to be there at all times. Taking time to have hobbies and socialise is absolutely imperative within dentistry to maintain your sanity, and the love you have for work.

Regarding holiday plans, skiing is a must for me. I go every year. Love it. I am also of that age where I probably attend about 2-3 stag weekends a year also so lots of those in Europe. My girlfriend turns 30 this year so we are going to Vegas in November with her family. The holiday I always look forward to is Ibiza. We are booked for August so I can't wait to turn into a teenager for five days.

If I hadn't gone into dentistry, maybe I would have chosen some sort of teaching

career route but if I'm being honest, being so close to London and having a lot of friends work within the financial district, I would have ended up there. I always wanted to be a pilot but my maths wasn't good enough.

In my job, I enjoy when a patient loves the work I have done, or messages afterwards saying 'I can't stop smiling' or 'my friend loves my lips, they want to come see you'. In dental hygiene seeing improvements on the 6PPC is always satisfying. USE YOUR TEPE BRUSHES!

I get home late sometimes. I have the gym after work or football/cricket training and piano practice. Bedtime is way too late after we indulge in Netflix; it can be 1.30 am or midnight! This is not ideal and something I need to work on.

My advice to facial aesthetic patients would be that less is more. Subtle changes are key, and don't just focus on one area for improvements. You don't want someone to say 'you have had your lips done'; you want them to say 'your lips look nice'.

It is the same with dentistry: a natural finish is so much nicer than the obvious.

Interview by Kate Quinlan

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41407-020-0290-4>