



‘I miss my dental colleagues massively’

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Emily Fitzgerald, 21, is a newly qualified

dental nurse based in Basingstoke. She describes her daily life during lockdown and her concerns for returning to work.

On a typical morning I wake up, have breakfast, shower, feed my two cats and take the dog for a walk. Usually I have porridge for breakfast and eat it in the kitchen. On the rare occasion, as a treat, I'll have pancakes with Nutella!

I'm currently living with my mum during lockdown; we're spending a lot more quality time together which is really nice. I usually walk the dog for around an hour with mum, if the weather isn't too hot for the dog! I like to take my camera out when walking.

If the weather is great, I will help my mum out in the garden and if needs be, I will run errands for my sister who is 35 weeks pregnant. As she is shielding, she can't get out and about as much. So, I just help out as much as I can, when I can and that usually consumes my day.

I decided to go into dental nursing in 2017 because I left college not having any idea of what I wanted to do. I saw a trainee dental nurse position being advertised locally and I decided to apply. I did lots of research about the job and the company I was applying for at the time. The job definitely sounded like something I would like to do. Fortunately, I got it and I worked as a trainee for two years.

I have now been dental nursing for almost three years and I love it. I completed the Level 3 National Diploma in Dental Nursing (NEBDN) in March 2020.

I also hold two qualifications in animal management: the Level 2 City & Guilds Diploma in Animal Management and Level 3 BTEC Diploma in Animal Management. Originally, I had planned to go to university to study veterinary nursing, but unfortunately I did not get the appropriate GCSEs at

school or college. That does not mean my qualifications have gone to waste: I hope to start my own dog grooming business one day.

I work for a dental practice that is 80% NHS and 20% private which closed its doors on 23 March. I was originally furloughed for three weeks in April, but because the practice is mixed, only two people can be furloughed at any one time. So I am at home not on furlough, but on 80%. I have not been redeployed at this point but I did put my interest forward back in March.

Very occasionally when my manager needs cover, I will go into the practice to carry out telephone triage for our patients and any other patients who may need help, even if they are not registered with us.

the time since it began. I am keeping busy, which is really important so that you don't go stir crazy. There are moments though that it does hit me and I do get quite upset that I cannot see my family and friends.

When lockdown is over I am so looking forward to seeing everyone. I am going to become an auntie soon and I am desperate to meet my new nephew, so that will be really nice when and if lockdown is over by then!

Regarding my job, I am worried that if we go back to work, I am not going to enjoy it as much as I used to. I have a friend who has worked in an urgent dental care hub, and he does not really fancy going back to dentistry at all. My other concern is that even though dental nurses worked so hard even before the

we do have a team group chat on WhatsApp and we all try and stay connected when we can. I miss the laughs and good times at work with the whole team, as we are all so close.

About a month ago I set up a Facebook support group for dental nurses. There were a lot of dental nurses all over the UK on another forum that felt like they weren't being heard and who were very unhappy with their pay and the way they were being treated during this time. I decided to create a support group because I wanted dental nurses to express how they felt with other people who knew what they were going through and hopefully create a 'voice' for all dental nurses. The group very quickly grew and now has 1,046 members and counting.

Running the group involves posting the latest updates from all our governing bodies such as the BDA, GDC, NHS, CDO, etc. I do a lot of research not just on guidance for England but guidance for Wales and Scotland too, so that nurses there get the right support as well.

We post light-hearted things in the group too, such as videos, memes and funny posts related to dentistry which we all enjoy. I try to post every other day, if not every day. There are also other members who contribute to the posting of content.

As a family, we all have a FaceTime group call in the mornings and catch up with what we did the day before. My sister had a virtual baby shower on 23 May with all her friends and our family. It was a really special day and she thoroughly enjoyed all the gifts that were sent to her.

I miss normal life, seeing family and friends and being able to go clothes shopping. I miss being able to have a normal conversation in the street with other human beings, whilst not being mindful of a 2 metre distance. It's just not human nature avoiding each other all the time!

I like to chill out in the evenings and maybe watch a film or a Netflix series. I am not the best cook in the world, but I do like to bake. Things I have made this lockdown include scones, banana loaf, cookies and cakes. It has been difficult to get hold of eggs and self-raising flour. I enjoy reading fantasy fiction when I have the time, usually before bed!

Interview by Kate Quinlan

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I usually cycle approximately 7 km a day providing I haven't been busy; I go by myself. I have been spending a lot of time in the garden particularly as the weather is wonderful at the moment. I like to garden and grow my own vegetables, herbs and fruit.

Because it's just mum and me at home, there have been times when the atmosphere has been a bit pressured and I have needed to have some time to myself. It can get quite intense sometimes being around the same person all the time, but we're managing. I am grateful for this time I am getting to spend with mum: there will probably never be another period like this in our lifetimes - let's hope not! When we get back to our busy schedules and daily lives, we won't get to spend as much time together. Also, my dog is getting a bit older now, she's ten-years-old and I am so happy that I get to spend this time with her, too.

I have actually enjoyed lockdown most of

pandemic, we're going to have to work even harder now. This is fine, I enjoy working hard, but many dental nurses and I are worried that our remuneration may not reflect our hard work.

I have thought a lot about doing another college course next year, purely to get another form of qualification under my belt, so that if I ever want to come out of dentistry, I have something else to fall back on, because everything is so uncertain. This period has inspired me to try something different, although I don't know what yet. I doubt I will ever leave dentistry for good, but even if I get something else on the side, that would be great.

In dentistry, I do hope to go on to do further post qualifications such as radiography, Botox/fillers and implants. I quite like the idea of working my way up to head nurse and eventually practice manager.

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