

# Dear dental nurse...



Associate dentist **Sharif Islam** pens a letter of appreciation to his dental nurse colleagues.

I hope this letter finds you rested well and in the process of recharging.

As I relayed to you last Friday, at the end of a long day at the conclusion of a long week, I was left uncharacteristically speechless by your implacable dedication to your work, your selfless commitment to our patients' wellbeing, and your unhesitant willingness to stay a few minutes late to ensure the cleanliness of our surgery.

I do not often find myself barren of self-expression, but how weak and toothless a simple thank you must have been at our last encounter to tender my sincere gratitude for a diligence so overwhelming on your part. I have therefore endeavoured to keep my promise made then of writing to you a fulsome appreciation of your efforts, too often without reward and always with such humility.

Walking into my surgery each morning, I am compelled to remember how much has already been prepared before taking my station upon my well-worn, and yet apparently just polished, saddle chair. The computers have already been switched on with our appointments conveniently displayed on the screen. The countertops are immaculately clean, with no extraneous detritus littering the surfaces or disturbing the carefully coordinated feng shui. Instruments have miraculously found their way into pouches and are neatly arranged in their drawer, despite having been soaked in blood, saliva and three kinds of cement a mere 18 hours earlier.

The imagination conjures up a secret army of nocturnal elves who emerge from the shadows in the surgery to cart instruments away for disinfection, like worker ants carrying leaves and twigs to their hill.

But of course, there are no such creatures and no footprints left from them across the pristine, polished surgery floor.

It was all you. This morning, as indeed

every morning, it was always you.

How remarkable that so much can be accomplished with such alacrity by nothing less than your extraordinary display of duty, an example that practitioners such as myself can mine each day for endless inspiration.

How indecorous, therefore, that such devotion should be met by such frequent indifference and the arrogant tendency to

rarely having to even rotate my head to ask for a single item. Every instrument and material I require is always in front of me at the appropriate moment, easily perceived as a supernatural clairvoyance but clearly a testament to your unexpendable experience.

That so many of our patients should leave so happy must certainly not be from the needle I stabbed them with or the hole I drilled into them. It most definitely cannot be from the invasion of my fat fingers or enough cotton rolls to clothe a large sheep. Their departing smile is instead a genuine reaction to the care and comfort you had provided to them, the gentle words of reassurance and encouragement, and quite possibly the sticker of The Lion King you had affixed to their lapel.

***'Should I stop to consider my own contribution to the collective service we strive to provide I find myself relegated to a mere toenail in the overall body of work that we achieve together.'***

assume its automatic undertaking.

How seemingly unjust that the remuneration for your exertion cannot possibly hope to meet its priceless value to me.

I cannot adequately convey my bewilderment at the apparent ease with which you manage the vast array of responsibilities weighing upon your shoulders. And yet this ease belies the stress and strain to which you and your colleagues subject yourself every single day.

Should I stop to consider my own contribution to the collective service we strive to provide I find myself relegated to a mere toenail in the overall body of work that we achieve together. As indisputably indispensable as you are to me, I fear my usefulness to your work is akin to an ashtray on a speeding motorcycle. As a practitioner I am undeservingly indulged and pampered,

Be in no doubt that the pride we all have for you cannot easily be measured or contained.

And it is my hope that in articulating this appreciation for you I can appease the presumption that demands so much of you, and offer the consolation that must be found in the gratitude of all of your colleagues.

When we meet again on Monday morning you will surely have a new idea of how cherished you are and the towering esteem in which you are beheld. And in the unthinkable event of it escaping my memory I shall have this letter to refer to as a most essential reminder.

Most sincerely,

Your eternally thankful colleague, Sharif.

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