The dental nurse researcher

Jennifer Malpass is a registered dental nurse and has an MA in Medical Education. She is currently a DCP Teaching Fellow and DN Research Practitioner at the University of Portsmouth Dental Academy. In 2020, she won an award in the Colgate Robin Davies DCP Awards, to support her research interests. **Kate Quinlan** spoke to Jennifer about her background in dentistry and involvement with research.

The awards

Colgate and the Oral & Dental Research Trust offer awards for research conducted by dental care professionals (DCPs). The awards honour Professor Robin Davies' contribution to dental research.

Four awards are made on the basis of an application for support of investigations of clinical relevance, particularly in the field of preventive care. While the applicant must be a DCP, it is anticipated that a research team will be formed to include a mentor or supervisor with an established research record.

<http://odrt.org.uk/colgate-dcp-awards/>

Interview

What originally attracted you to dentistry?

This might sound a bit corny, but I always wanted to work in a caring profession where I could help people. Ever since I was little I have always looked out for others. I think that dentistry provides the perfect environment to deliver that care and support.

Can you outline your career history?

It has been over 20 years since I started in dentistry, so this is quite lengthy! When I left college, I gained a position as a trainee dental nurse in a local dental practice. I really enjoyed working there, but when a trainee position was advertised at Dundee Dental School, I knew I had to go for it as it would open up a world of opportunities. After qualifying, I worked at the Dental School for another four years. In 2005, I moved to Southampton and saw a vacancy for a dental nurse with Solent NHS Special Care Dental Service. This is where my eyes were opened to the different barriers to dental care experienced by people living with additional or more complex needs. I held a variety of roles, working as a clinical dental nurse, with the paediatric general anaesthetic team and the Trust's Oral Health Promotion team. In 2014, I moved on from the Special Care Dental Service to begin a position as a DCP Teaching Fellow at the University of Portsmouth Dental Academy. With support from my colleagues and the Head of School, in 2019 I completed

a Masters in Medical Education. I am still significantly involved in the Dental Academy's undergraduate DCP teaching, learning and assessment alongside my current research role.

What is a DN Research Practitioner and how did you become one?

I'm not sure that there is a formal definition for the role. I imagine that it might mean different things, depending on which organisation you belong to. I started the DN Research Practitioner role in January this year. It is a partnership between Solent NHS Trust and the University of Portsmouth Dental Academy. I think that both organisations recognise the value and benefit of developing a research workforce that utilises the skill of the wider dental team. I think that the role might have looked a little different if it weren't for the COVID-19 pandemic which limited the opportunities for clinical research delivery. My role is primarily working from home designing and developing research which will be delivered soon, when restrictions allow.

What does your working week look like at the moment?

My working week is split between my research and teaching role. The Trust's research and improvement team are being very generous with both their time and their expertise. Three days a week I focus on the research role, which up until very recently has predominantly been developing the protocol, questionnaires, patient information sheets and consent forms for my project and completing the IRAS [Integrating Research Application System] application. I have really enjoyed the process and I can't believe

in and learn more about research after my dissertation?

What was the research proposal that you entered into the Colgate Robin Davies DCP Awards?

I applied for the Robin Davies Award to undertake a study that seeks to establish the acceptability of an oral care training programme and understand any change in knowledge, attitudes, practice and confidence of staff in care homes, following training in the delivery of oral health care.

Has it been delayed by the pandemic?

The research is going to take place in care homes for older people, which were significantly impacted during the pandemic. So, while yes, there has been a delay to the research, I am able to understand that the pressures and challenges faced by our care colleagues far outweighs the drawbacks of this delay. That said, informal conversations with care home managers recently indicated that they were ready to be involved in research again which is very exciting for the progression of the project.

When the project is completed I hope to share the research through publication and I also intend to share the results widely with the care homes that participate.

My current research role is a fixed term post and ends in December. I plan to continue to develop my research skills and my long-term plan is to complete a PhD. I have the support of my colleagues at the University and at Solent NHS Trust who are mentoring and guiding me through the research terrain.

Would you encourage other DCPs to get involved with research?

Absolutely. While it can be difficult to come across roles in research as a dental nurse, there are opportunities out there. A number of university and dental hospitals have roles for dental nurses within a clinical research team. While it might feel a little intimidating, talk to people about your research interests and seek out and try to network with people who work in your research area of interest. Twitter is a great starting place and there is a fantastic dental research community growing on there.

What are your interests outside dentistry?

I really enjoy going on walks and hikes. Hampshire has some fantastic trails and scenery and when the weather is right, you would be hard pushed to want to be anywhere else. Even before the pandemic, my husband, dogs and I enjoyed a good staycation and we have visited almost every corner of the UK from Land's End to John O' Groats.

Any exciting plans coming up?

It is our 20-year wedding anniversary in September this year and we had planned to go somewhere exotic to celebrate. But, we have decided to postpone and enjoy our back garden with our old dogs instead. And to tell you the truth we will love that every bit as much!

'There are opportunities out there. A number of university and dental hospitals have roles for dental nurses within a clinical research team. Talk to people about your research interests.'

what I have learnt. I am really keen to develop my skills and knowledge in research, so I am always asking academic and clinical research colleagues if there is anything that I can do for them or help them with. No job is too big or small because it is all valuable learning for me. My persistence paid off and I am also currently working on a service evaluation of mouth care training delivered to care homes and carers live online through video streaming. The remainder of my week is spent carrying out teaching and administrative duties which support undergraduate DCP education. We have just finished a busy assessment period and at present we are working hard to plan our teaching and assessment for the next academic year.

What interested you in dental research?

It was my work with the Oral Health Promotion team that first piqued my interest in dental research. When we were planning and developing oral health interventions we would try to ground the work in evidence. While I was aware of clinical research in both dentistry and medicine, up until that point research addressing oral health and general health inequalities hadn't really been on my radar. When completing the MA in Medical Education I absolutely loved having to plan, develop and deliver a research project and it got me asking myself, is there a way for me to get involved

How does the award support your research and what is your role?

With support from my Dental Academy research supervisor, I am undertaking the role of Principal Investigator for this research study. This means that I am designing the project and developing the research protocol and documents. I am also working with the team at Solent NHS Trust to provide opportunities for Patient and Public Involvement in the project through their Care Home Research Partnership. Again, with support from my colleagues and supervisor, I will deliver the research and the oral health training intervention and collect, analyse and evaluate research data to present the project's findings. The award supports the research in a number of ways. It has given my self-confidence as a very early career researcher a boost. It also supports the scale of the project, allowing me to approach an increased number of care homes to participate in the research which gives me a better chance of recruiting a sample size where findings will yield useful information.

How is the research progressing?

We are just about ready to submit the IRAS application and also submit to the University's Ethics Committee. I am really excited to begin the delivery stage of the research and hope to begin this as soon as we have gained these approvals.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41407-021-0704-y>