‘I am loving all aspects of the job’

Jade Topping, 29, is a dental nurse at Martin Curran Oral Surgery Practice in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Jade holds the NEBDN National Diploma for Dental Nurses, the British Dental Association’s qualification in oral health education and a Level 3 in Teaching and Education.

I used to get up at 6.15 am but now I don’t have to get up until 7.00 am. The later start makes me feel so much more refreshed! I work 15 minutes away from where I live in Lisburn which is great. I park far away from the practice so that I get a walk in and on the way home. It helps clear my head and keeps me fit physically and mentally. I’d rather not have to exercise when I get home, I’m too tired.

I eat my breakfast in work as I find I’m pretty hungry quickly in the morning if I don’t. I try not to snack and hold off until lunch time. I have either Weetabix with peanut butter or two caramel rice cakes with peanut butter. I’m obsessed with peanut butter!

I work full-time Monday-Friday 9 am–5 pm (35 hours a week).

Each day is different throughout the week. I may be in surgery half the day then in the decontamination room for the other half. I also can be at reception greeting patients and checking patients in along with taking payments.

My sister is a dental nurse [Stacy Topping, also featured this month in *BDJ Team*] and three of our cousins are dental nurses too. Once I finished my Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Health and Social Care, I didn’t really know what else I should do. I had considered adult nursing, but a job was advertised in general dental practice with my sister, so I thought I’d give the interview a go. Eight years later and I’m still in dentistry.

At school I had thought I might want to work as a primary school teacher. In dentistry

I still get to work with children and I am able to use my years of experience. I especially enjoyed it when I worked in a specialist orthodontic practice with children and young adults.

In my first role as a trainee dental nurse in general practice I studied for my NEBDN national diploma in the evenings. I loved working in general practice but I wanted to specialise in orthodontics, so when a job was advertised I jumped at the chance. I worked as an orthodontic nurse for two years; I gained so much experience and enjoyed the job. I loved how it wasn't messy – no crown preps or endo to clear up after!

After that I decided to travel around Australia. It was lovely to experience a different culture but I spent so much money in the first six months, it was time to look for a job! I started researching dental nursing in Australia and found that you didn't need any experience or qualification to work as a dental nurse. They did have an exam in place but it wasn't a requirement, or registration with the Dental Board of Australia. I found a holistic practice in Brisbane walking distance from my apartment: result!

It was very different working in a private practice in Australia and I picked up so many skills. At the time I was removing amalgam fillings with FFP3 masks and an air flow system – did they know COVID was coming?

The pandemic hit and Australia went into a two-week lockdown; I continued to work as I wasn't a citizen and not entitled to any pay. I didn't find it much different as we already had so many safety precautions in place. Initial COVID restrictions didn't last as long in Australia as the UK, although it's a different matter now. While COVID had well and truly hit in the UK I was fortunate enough to continue working and even found time to complete my BDA oral health education post qualification – what would we do without the internet? I completed my course and exam all online.

Fast forward to April 2021 and I had landed back in the UK and found myself looking for a dental nurse job close to home. I didn't realise how short of dental nurses we were here – what had COVID-19 done to the profession?

I started off my journey back in the UK in general practice before landing my dream job in a specialist oral surgery practice. I have only been in post for a short period of time, but I am loving all aspects of the job.

I am learning so many new skills, especially in dental sedation. I am getting to see new procedures, which has got me excited again about dental nursing. I love that no

day is the same and each day my confidence grows. I find it exciting that there are always new skills and knowledge to gain as a dental nurse and that you can become more involved with the patient and their care.

Before I moved to Australia I was involved with the Girls' Brigade delivering oral health talks. I am passionate about delivering oral health education to the younger generation as there are so many hidden sugars in foods and juices that children/parents are unaware of and so many ways we can prevent decay in early childhood. I have set up an Instagram page @thetoothnurse to encourage the public to look after their oral health with simple

'I find it exciting that there are always new skills and knowledge to gain as a dental nurse and that you can become more involved with the patient and their care.'

reminders on the benefits of carrying out simple tasks in their everyday daily routines.

I am a lifelong learner; I am always looking at areas I need to gain more skills and knowledge in within my role as a dental nurse. I will be applying for the NEBDN post qualifications in sedation and radiography. While completing these qualifications I will gain 45 CPD hours from each course. I enjoy the courses the BDA have to offer on their website, and complete these in my spare time.

I usually get home between 5–5.30pm.

Outside work I love to listen to podcasts and acquire new knowledge about the body and health; I am always looking at ways to improve my overall health. I try not to snack between meals. When I want treats at the weekend I try to eat them all at once instead of grazing throughout the day.

I encourage my young nephew to brush

his teeth – who knew how difficult it was to get the toothbrush in there? I lead by example by brushing with him. I try to tell family and friends the information I have learnt from studying; they sometimes listen, and sometimes they just roll their eyes!

My weekends are usually jam packed with spa days or hotel getaways. I love walking and always go on a hike on a Sunday with my family.

I tend to go to bed too late... thinking ahead my New Year's resolution is to go to bed at 10.30 pm. I get addicted to a new series and end up in bed at 11.30/45 pm.

Next year I hope to pass my post qualification in dental sedation and to complete a foundation course in facial aesthetics. There are so many career progression options a dental nurse could pursue; I have been researching the Level 4 Oral Health Practitioner course, however currently it is not offered in Northern Ireland. I would love to work directly with patients delivering oral health prevention, providing preventative treatments, and general health screenings.

Next year I'm also travelling to San Francisco to attend my brother's wedding – lucky me!

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41407-021-0767-9>