



Dental nursing in a neuro-disability hospital

Dental nurse manager **Louise Gallagher** describes a typical day being a dental nurse at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability in Putney, South West London.

Louise has been a dental nurse for almost 24 years, having originally seen an advert for a dental nursing role in the local paper. Louise started in private practice then left to join a dental nurse agency to gain more experience and learn new skills. At the agency she temped at hospitals and practices both private and NHS working with various specialists. She finally got a permanent post within the community dental service and stayed in that role for 14 years. She completed various post-registration qualifications and became a specialist dental nurse. After her two sons were born she needed something closer to home, which is when she applied for her current role almost five years ago. She is also lead nurse for Mouth Care Matters.

It's early Monday morning and I receive notification of a new patient admitted for rehabilitation. Reading the diagnosis always puts life into perspective and I try to remind myself not to worry about the small things.

I work as a dental nurse alongside four part-time dental consultants at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability (RHN) in Putney, a charity hospital specialising in care and rehabilitation for people with brain injuries and neurological conditions. The hospital's 12 wards are made up of a rehabilitation service, two ventilator units, a specialist nursing home and specialist services for complex challenging behaviour and Huntington's disease.

Although the circumstances of each patient and resident here can be upsetting, the atmosphere of the hospital is positive and welcoming.

This morning I have been asked to deliver training on oral care at the nurses' early morning handover on one of our long term care wards. For some of our patients providing oral care can prove difficult, due to their injury or condition. Training helps to

ensure that staff can provide oral care in a way that takes these difficulties into account. The ward staff work incredibly hard to ensure they provide the best care and the training is well received.

As well as training on the wards I am involved in classroom-based training for registered nurses, health care assistants gaining their level 3 certificate and student nurses who have a placement at the hospital.

Back at the dental department I set up the surgery and conduct all necessary tests of dental equipment and relevant checklists ready for the day ahead.

At the RHN we provide all NHS dental treatment. For the patients who are admitted for rehabilitation our aim is to ensure that they are comfortable and dentally fit before discharge. The majority of our patients are wheelchair dependent so instead of a dental chair we use a wheelchair recliner. The patient's wheelchair will sit on the platform of the recliner and once in position the recliner can then be adjusted accordingly, just like a dental chair.

Our first patient needs a full assessment and treatment as required with the use of Midazolam intravenous sedation. The patient has been seen previously but due to limited mouth opening a full assessment was not possible, however some dental caries was evident.

As the patient will be sedated, they arrive with a registered nurse, as specified in the pre-operative sedation instructions. The patient sedates well and we are able to take radiographs and perform a dental extraction; I assist with the treatment and monitor the SATS whilst ensuring the patient is comfortable throughout. Once treatment has been completed and the patient has recovered, I remove the cannula and the patient is discharged into the care of the nurse.

Sometimes we provide a joint sedation service with other hospital disciplines if it is felt that certain procedures would benefit the patient whilst being sedated for dental treatment. For example, Botox injections, or the change of feeding tubes for patients who are nil by mouth. These are procedures that I would never get to see if I worked elsewhere, so I feel that I am constantly learning.

Recently I completed a cannulation course and am looking forward to getting started.

Part of the afternoon is spent on the wards visiting new patients who have recently been admitted to check they have suitable oral care products and to see if they require any urgent dental care.

Back at the department we carry on with the preparations for a conference we are



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holding at the hospital in the next few weeks titled 'Intravenous sedation for special care patients'. Although we have held conferences and webinars before, sharing our expertise with other health professionals is something that I would never have imagined being part of and it definitely pushes me out of my comfort zone. One of the most encouraging comments we have received was that it was great to see the whole dental team involved, and I feel it's really important that dental nurses are recognised.

I receive an email to complete the dental

section on the discharge report of a patient, who after an extensive stay in an acute hospital and a three month stay here, is finally going home. I appreciate what a big moment this is for the patient and their family.

Working at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability is like no other place I have worked. I feel privileged to work alongside an amazing group of people who care so much about the patients and residents and what we can provide for them.

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