

'Interacting with staff and patients is the highlight of my day'



Tony Benford, a 36-year-old GDC registered dental nurse, describes an average working day in his life.

It all starts with an Amazon Alexa waking me at 6:30 am. My first task is to check my phone notifications to see if there are any messages from work colleagues. This is around the time the team would call if there were any issues preventing us from working today. Following this is a shower and of course, brushing my teeth, followed by a quick bowl of breakfast cereal, and I jump in the car, ready to start my commute to work.

I live in a village called South Normanton, with is about 11 miles from Matlock where I work. This usually takes about 25 minutes.

I arrive at work ready for the practice to open at 8 am. My current role is Practice Manager for Dental Partners, a corporate group of practices. Our practice is a mixed NHS and private practice offering dental care to patients from many different backgrounds. The team consist of three dentists, one dental therapist, four dental nurses and two receptionists.

When I was at school, I never considered dentistry as a career; in fact, I wanted to work in IT. This is the route I would have gone down if I had never discovered dentistry.

I got into dentistry just after I left college, when a group of practices called Genesis Dental opened in my area. Being new build practices, they needed people to accept calls from patients wishing to register and I joined two other people for this role. Six months following this, I moved to reception in a dental practice

in my hometown, and that is when I really started to discover dentistry. I was amazed at the difference dentistry made to people's lives, and the role dental nurses played in putting smiles on people's faces. Still to this day, after 16 years in dentistry, I find it rewarding when a patient leaves the practice having their pain relieved or when their cosmetic treatment exceeds their expectations, and they leave feeling satisfied. Interacting with staff and patients is the highlight of my day.

My first experience in surgery was late 2007, when I joined the NEBDN national diploma in dental nursing. I finally qualified as a dental nurse in 2009. At that time, I was in no hurry to progress my career as I really enjoyed what I did. I moved over to a sister practice in Matlock in 2010 and have remained at this practice until today. I stepped up to Lead Dental Nurse in 2018 and became Practice Manager in 2019.

I like the flexibility and challenges my current role brings and how each day is different. The only downside to the job is that sometimes there are not enough hours in the working day.

During the first lockdown, our practice became a NHS Urgent Dental Centre, providing care for patients from miles around who were suffering from a dental emergency, but who were unable to visit their usual practice. Out of my career so far, this makes me proud to work in dentistry.

During the pandemic, I have seen all over

social media how unhappy many dental nurses are with their career. I believe dental nurses are feeling undervalued and a little ignored. It was around this time I discovered the Society of Dental Nurses (SBDN) and all the good projects they are involved with. It is because of this discovery I never even considered leaving the profession. I am determined to help improve the lives of dental nurses.

Lunchtime comes at 12:45 pm, and usually involves a visit to the local sandwich shop and sitting having a chat or sharing a joke or two with the team in the staff room. At 1:45 pm it's back to work until 5 pm, although I usually leave just after 5 pm as I like to finish tasks I have started.

Most nights I am home for around 6 pm. The evening will consist of spending time with the family and enjoying quiet time after the busy workday. Often in the evening I will spend some time on a project with the SBDN or possibly doing CPD online. If time allows I might play a few games on the Xbox and am in bed for around 11:30 pm, ready to start a new day at 6:30 am once more.

My long-term goal within dentistry is to own my own dental practice.

At the weekend I am usually found outdoors with a camera. I am incredibly lucky to live so close to the Peak District, a beautiful part of the UK.

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