



Dental nurses around the world

What is it like to be a dental nurse in countries besides the UK? *BDJ Team* spoke to dental nurses/dental assistants in New Zealand, Pakistan and Australia.



NEW ZEALAND

Neethu Susan Thomas, 34, graduated as a dentist (BDS) in India in 2011 and moved to New Zealand the following year. She has been working as a dental assistant at a practice in Auckland, a large city in the North Island of New Zealand, since 2015.

Neethu is in the process of registering as a dentist in New Zealand and is taking exams with the Australian Dental Council, but these have been delayed due to the pandemic as the borders are currently closed.

Neethu also enjoys temping as a dental assistant at other practices in Auckland.

What attracted you to dentistry?

Neethu: I am passionate about caring for people. I always enjoy communicating with people, finding out more about their dental status and educating them on how important it is to look after your oral health as much as your general health.

Do you enjoy being a dental assistant?

Neethu: Yes I do; it's a big platform for me to get experienced for my [dentist] registration exam in New Zealand. I love talking to the patients, hearing their dental experience and also learning about their culture.

Are you happy with the working conditions for your job and are there opportunities for advancement/promotion?

Neethu: I am happy with the conditions but there aren't really opportunities for advancement.

Do you have to be registered to work as a dental assistant in New Zealand, and complete CPD?

Neethu: No.

Hobbies and interests outside work?

Neethu: Gardening and cooking.



PAKISTAN

Naila Rahim, 37, from Karachi in Pakistan, is Dental Clinic Supervisor at Aga Khan University Hospital Karachi, Pakistan. Naila holds a Masters in Arts.

What attracted you to dentistry?

Naila: I always wanted to become a dentist but due to some financial issues I couldn't fulfil my dream. Being so passionate about dentistry, I joined the Aga Khan University Hospital as a dental assistant.

Do you enjoy being a dental assistant?

Naila: Of course, I love my job as a dental assistant and I have devoted a lot of time and efforts in improving the dental set up at Aga Khan University Hospital.

Are you happy with the working conditions for your job?

Naila: Certainly; it is well-known that Aga Khan University Hospital is a well-established tertiary care hospital. It provides a safe and supportive environment for its employees and opportunities for them to grow.

Are there opportunities for promotion?

Naila: Yes, there are opportunities for promotion. When I joined Aga Khan Hospital I was hired as a dental assistant and right now I am Dental Clinic Supervisor.

Do you intend to take further qualifications?

Naila: Indeed, I am very much interested in upgrading my academic qualifications to

become better at my job.

Do you feel respected as a professional?

Naila: As a professional employed in Aga Khan University Hospital, I feel respected being a part of such a reputable organisation.

Do you have to be registered to work as a dental assistant in Pakistan?

Naila: Apprenticeship module training is required. We have to complete an exit exam as a dental surgery assistant/dental hygienist.

Hobbies and interests outside work?

Naila: Reading newspapers and articles, swimming, shopping with friends and designing my own clothes.



AUSTRALIA

Denise Brennan, 33, is originally from Dublin in Ireland but now lives in Goulburn, Australia where she is practice manager at a private dental clinic. Denise holds a Diploma in Dental Nursing; Certificate in Conscious Sedation; First Aid Qualified; ECDL and City and Guilds.

What attracted you to dentistry?

Denise: I've always been interested in anything medical so when I got the chance to work in a dental clinic after finishing school, I jumped on it.

Do you enjoy being a dental nurse/dental assistant?

Denise: I very much enjoy being part of a small, close-knit team and getting to meet so many different people from all walks of life, never knowing who's going to walk through the door next.

Are you happy with the working conditions for your job in Australia?

Denise: The Australian standards in dentistry are among the highest in the world and I'm employed permanent/full time with a generous salary, so I certainly can't complain.

Are there opportunities for advancement/promotion?

Denise: I was given the opportunity to relocate to Sydney to manage two practices but opted to stay in Goulburn (about two hours south) because of the lifestyle.

Do you intend to take further qualifications?

Denise: Not at this stage, but possibly in the future if the right course presents itself.

Do you feel respected as a professional?

Denise: Absolutely. If the people you work with and who you see day-to-day don't show you respect as a professional or as person, you're in the wrong job.

Do you have to be registered to work in Australia, and complete CPD?

Denise: It is not mandatory in Australia at this stage, but I believe it should be.

Hobbies and interests outside work?

Denise: Spending time with my wife Alison and five cats; walking, hiking, visiting local wineries, and soaking up the Australian sun.

Denise describes her career journey:

After completing our course in the Dublin Dental School and Hospital in 2008, two Irish dental assistants (my friend Sarah and I) jumped on a plane and flew to the Land Down Under for a year's working holiday/adventure. After nine months of temping in dental practices all over New South Wales, not ready to go home, we impulsively decided to go to Northern Queensland to do three months' rural work to qualify for a second-year visa. During this time, we did everything from picking and packing seasonal fruit to walking in front of gigantic harvesting machines with diamond sharp whirling blades, picking up huge rocks so they didn't damage the blades of death following close behind us. It was brutal but overall a fantastic experience. Plus, we made a lot of friends with whom I remain in contact today.

After qualifying for a second year working in Australia, I was lucky enough to be offered sponsorship by one of the practices I'd temped for. That allowed me to apply for a permanent resident visa. I have my citizenship test coming up in November 2021.