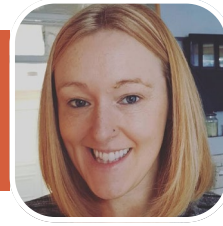


# ‘I’m officially a teeth geek!’



**Kelly Woodward,**  
from  
Yeovil in  
Somerset,

has been a dental nurse for over 20 years, the last seven in a specialist private referral practice. She has nursed for all the dental specialties, is implant and dental radiography qualified, and has just qualified as a dental nurse tutor. At the moment she is applying for funding for a project that she has planned to deliver oral health instruction to vulnerable children in the community.

**W**hen I left school I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I saw an advert for a trainee dental nurse and thought 'that will be something to do until I decide what I actually want to do'. I immediately fell in love with dental nursing, and 22 years later I'm more passionate about it than ever. I'm officially a teeth geek!

Over my career as a dental nurse, I've worked in two different practices: a very busy NHS practice, and a private specialist referral practice. I enjoy every aspect of dentistry. I love talking to all the different patients that come through the door. My favourite aspect of dental nursing is surgical/implant nursing. I've had the pleasure of working with some fantastic implantologists and periodontists.

Completing the extended duty qualifications for me was absolutely essential. For example, the NEBDN certificate in implant nursing has given me a greater



understanding of implants, the placement procedure, grafting materials and why and how things are done. This has given me greater confidence to be able to talk to patients and know that I'm explaining procedures concisely and accurately.

My radiography qualification has been utilised fully by every clinician I've nursed with, as well as giving me a greater sense of being involved with patients' care. Clinicians are very appreciative of me being able to take the radiographs. They can be finalising their clinical notes or treatment plans, so it saves a lot of time.

In my current dental practice we have a separate radiography room and I enjoy taking the patient and chatting to them, building a rapport whilst getting their x-rays.

The knowledge you gain whilst undertaking extended duty qualifications is so valuable; you gain more confidence as you understand why things are being done a certain way. I have an inquisitive, curious brain and really enjoy learning.

### Tutoring

I decided to become a tutor because I myself really enjoy learning. I have enjoyed training many nurses in the practical side of dental nursing and thought I would enjoy helping other nurses gain these qualifications, and realise their own potential.

When I completed an extended duty course with Molar Mentoring, I had firsthand experience of how supportive my tutor, Heidi, was. Any questions I had she was straight back to me – nothing was too much trouble. That is when I raised the subject with her of me becoming a tutor. She was so supportive and encouraging.

I took the level 3 award in education and training (online) in order to qualify as a tutor, formally known as PTLLS.

I now work for Molar Mentoring providing the BDA certificate in radiography, with much more to come in the future.

I'm a huge advocate for dental nurses fulfilling the extent of the role. We are registered professionals and there is such an array of ways in which we can utilise our full scope of practice.

A year ago I took the Molar Mentoring pregnancy and paediatric oral health course; this ignited my passion for educating children about their oral health. The fact that tooth removal is one of the main reasons under 5s are having to undergo general anaesthetic to have carious teeth removed breaks my heart. In the modern developed world tooth decay is so preventable and these general anaesthetics are so avoidable.

### Oral health promotion

I also completed Victoria Wilson's Smile Revolution oral health promotion course; my place was kindly sponsored by Philips. This gave me the tools and desire to turn my ideas into an actual proposal to put forward for a funding opportunity, with the help of Heidi Grimwood, Molar Mentoring's founder and owner. The aim of the project will be to provide education and promote good oral health to parents and carers of pre-school children, reducing the chances of tooth decay.

When I thought about where I was going to start with helping children I decided I wanted to try to get involved in helping children in the vulnerable category: children who are unable to be with their birth parents, or are still with them but are on protection plans; children whose oral health may not be a main priority for their care givers.

We know that 'looked after children' are more likely to have dental problems and are less likely to use dental services than their peers. I want to try and change this. When I was in my initial stages of market research for my proposal, I could not find anyone who was offering the service I am trying to introduce. I have applied for funding from my local authority, as well as exploring other options.

what was such an uncertain time. Heading back to the dental practice with all the extra PPE and cleaning protocols was hard work too.

Dentistry itself has been impacted so significantly, I wonder if it will ever recover. It means that patients who have always been regular attenders have ended up missing their routine appointments, so the children I



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### Family life

I am definitely particular with my own children's oral health. We limit sugar to meal times and brush twice a day with children's electric toothbrushes. We try to make it as fun as possible. My children enjoy using an egg timer to know how long they are brushing for, and every couple of months we use disclosing solution to check brushing. They all enjoy doing this and are quite competitive that their brushing is better than their siblings'.

The pandemic has definitely impacted me workwise. During the first lockdown I was on maternity leave; I had my third child right on the cusp of going into lockdown. It was incredibly difficult to end my mat leave sending my children back into childcare in

am aiming my oral health project at have no chance unfortunately!

Hence, now I think is such a good time for me to launch this, to try and bridge the gap between access to dentistry and vulnerable children.

My career plans moving forward are to get my oral health promotion project up and running. I'd like to do the suture removal and sedation nursing extended duty courses. I also plan to continue with my tutoring at Molar Mentoring, offering implant nursing and an introduction to perio.

**Interview by Kate Quinlan**

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