



From dental nurse to managing director

Anna Lown, from Norfolk, is Managing Director/Dental Tutor at Smiles Dental Training, a dental nurse training company. Anna is a dental nurse, has trained dental nurses to become tutors, and has co-written a book, *Questions and answers in oral health education*. Anna also assesses for City and Guilds Apprenticeships. Interview by Kate Quinlan

How did you originally get into dental nursing?

A friend of mine had just started in the position and they had a vacancy for a trainee nurse, so I applied and got the job!

What appealed to you about dental nursing?

The patient interaction and the different skills that you learn. I still enjoy being a dental nurse, even though my nursing days are now very few.

Can you outline your career history since starting out as a dental nurse?

I started as a trainee dental nurse back in 2006 with PE Roos and Associates and qualified in 2007 with my NEBDN Diploma. I then went on to do many post qualifications which included oral health education, mentoring, team leadership and topical fluoride application. I then stepped into a practice manager position in 2009 to cover maternity leave and continued in that position covering multiple practices until 2019. During this time, back in 2011 I knew that I wanted to teach dental nursing as I loved this aspect of the job. I self-funded my teaching

qualification and decided to set up a dental training company to help the trainee nurses who we had within our own practice as there was no course provider locally to us.

Smiles Dental Training (SDT) was set up in 2012 after the successful accreditation to deliver the NEBDN Diploma. With my first cohort of six students, I was in my element and knew that I wanted to do this alongside my full time dental nursing role. Fast forward ten years and SDT is now a very successful training provider offering all the NEBDN qualifications.

In recent years I have also taken on the role of compliance advisor and enjoy working with Dental Compliance Made Easier. This role adds knowledge and awareness of another element to the dental practice, and I really enjoy offering support to practices.

In 2021 I co-authored a book with my friend and colleague Chloe, which was published by Wiley. *Questions and answers in oral health education* is the only revision aid purposely written for the oral health education qualification and we are immensely proud of it. We are currently in the process of writing another book which will hopefully be published next year with Wiley.

Did you seek advice or help when you set up the training company?

I had very good employers who helped me with setting up the business. They believed in me and the company and supported me throughout.

We launched the company in 2012, initially just with our own practice trainees, and then eventually branched out locally and now nationally! We started with six students and now have 200 across all courses.

How did you recruit students/trainees?

Through the company I worked for and then by word of mouth. We do now advertise on social media platforms and forums, but we are so blessed that employers who use us once will continue to use as they are happy with the service we provide.

How did you recruit tutors?

Most of the tutors we have working for Smiles are previous work colleagues who I have helped to upskill and then offered them a position. I am also very fortunate to have two tutors who were not recruited in this way, but emailed me their CV, and after the interview, I knew that I wanted them to work for me.

All of the tutors that work for me have the same vision and ethos as myself, and that is so important to me.

How did you adapt during the pandemic?

We had already changed to our online classroom-based course prior to the pandemic, so for us it was very much business as usual, however we did have to adapt how we prepared learners for the new exam style.

Have you continued working as a dental nurse while in your current role?

I don't tend to work in practice as much now due to being incredibly busy with the company, however, I am always on hand to be called upon by a few of my dentist friends if needed.

What is the favourite post-graduation course that you offer?

My favourite is the oral health education course and I am a true believer that prevention is better than cure! Teaching patients how to look after their dentition is so important, especially instilling good habits in children at a young age.

Would you consider branching out into training for other dental care professionals (DCPs)?

Our CPD course on 'dental compliance made easier' is accessed by other members of the dental team besides dental nurses. I am in the process of planning further training and courses for DCPs besides dental nurses.

Does Smiles Dental Training have any exciting plans coming up this year?

We launch our orthodontic course in September 2022 as well as further developments in CPD courses and locum/recruitment services.

How did you become a City & Guilds assessor?

I was hired to set up the Dental Nurse Apprenticeship course for the training company Poultec back in December 2019 and officially started in January 2020. I wrote the resources and course structure

within the first few months of starting and we soon had enquiries and learners signing up to the course. We now have a successful Apprenticeship programme where we have four dental tutors delivering the course.

Can you tell us about the book that you co-wrote?

Chloe had the idea of writing the book and after much discussion, we put it forward to Wiley. They soon commissioned the book and after lots of initial paperwork, we were on our way to writing the book. It came with its challenges, having never written one

(sometimes painful) PPE, procedures and policies. I do also believe that dental nurses' pay has had an impact on the current crisis, with dental nurses now having so many more available options to them eg locum or specialist work, where they are paid a much higher rate.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I love to spend time with my family hiking in the Lake District. I have a small flock of sheep who I enjoy looking after and I also enjoy going to the gym.

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previously, but we both learnt along the way and we were very proud once it was published and that dental nurses will benefit from using it ahead of their exams.

Do you think dental nursing is a good career with fair conditions?

I believe that with the right environment, dental nursing is a great career. There are so many different opportunities for dental nurses to progress and further their careers. It doesn't just stop once you qualify!

Would you like to comment on the so-called 'dental nurse recruitment crisis'?

I believe that the pandemic has played a big part in this crisis. The job changed dramatically and there were so many changes that took away some elements of the role as well as adding so many more. The clinical governance that had to be read, understood, and actioned was a lot for the dental team to take on. I do believe that we are still in the after effects of this and that some dental nurses no longer enjoy the job due to the extra pressures, stresses, additional

How is your work-life balance?

I work around 60 hours a week and do some of my work in the weekday evenings so that I don't miss out on things with my husband and little boy. I have some very long days sometimes, but I manage to make it work.

Do you have any further career plans you'd like to share?

I will be developing Smiles in the coming years and with that would like to gain qualifications in business management.

Are you proud of your career in dentistry so far, and would you recommend your career path to other dental nurses?

I am really proud of what I have achieved in my dental career so far. I am an extremely ambitious person and there is always something that I am planning for Smiles and in my personal life. I never sit still! I would highly recommend a career in dental tutoring as it is so rewarding.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41407-022-0924-9>