

Having a calming influence on patients



Emma Louise Jefford, 39, is a dental therapist

at Bridgewater NHS Foundation Trust.

I usually get up at 7 am, but ideally as late as possible! I'm originally from Helsby in Cheshire but I currently live in Northwich. I eat breakfast at home, usually cereal – only recently as I used to skip breakfast and just have a brew.

I drive to work, which is at three different sites over a 33.5 hour week, Monday to Friday: Dene Drive Winsford which is six miles away; Leigh Health Centre which is 27 miles away; and Bath Street Health and Wellbeing Centre Warrington, 20 miles away.

I usually work to my full scope of practice treating special care patients, paediatrics and anxious adults. Every day is mixed treatments involving perio, deciduous extractions, fillings, fissure sealants, taking impressions, treating patients under conscious sedation, and silver diamine fluoride (SDF) applications. I am also involved in epidemiology and have just taken part in the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry (BASCD) five-year-old dental health survey. This is due to start again with a new survey and I will be taking part in calibration for a survey on Year 6 children across the North West.

At school, I studied A levels and loved art, so went on to complete a diploma in children's book illustration and animation in Newcastle Upon Tyne. I then decided to move back home and ended up getting a job at my local dental practice whilst I learnt how to drive and looked for jobs, as I still wasn't sure what I really wanted to do with my life. From there I ended up completing the NVQ 3 dental nursing qualification as I found the job interesting. I did some research on how I could progress further and then took the dental radiography course.

After working in NHS practice for six years I went on to work at Manchester Children's Hospital. Here I experienced working in general anaesthesia (GA), doing ward visits, assisted in oral health clinics and

multidisciplinary clinics, and with treating patients with cleft palate, special care, haemophilia and orthodontics. Then my boss kindly printed off the application for dental hygiene and therapy and the rest is history.

I studied dental hygiene and dental therapy at the Manchester School for Dental Care Professionals. Upon qualifying I returned to NHS practice in Crewe and Nantwich; worked in private practices in Old Trafford, Alderley Edge and Winsford; then moved to community dentistry where I have worked for seven years in April. Five of these years I also worked in three prison sites as part of the community contract.

I moved into teaching alongside my community role and became a dental tutor at the Manchester School for DCPs. This enabled me to run a clinic of 12 students, prepare and teach lectures, and examine internally for the Royal College of Surgeons. I have also worked in Manchester Dental Hospital as an honorary clinical fellow and Liverpool Dental Hospital as a paediatric dental therapist. I have undertaken courses in facial aesthetics, conscious sedation, prescribing radiographs, tooth whitening and have also taught dental nurses fluoride application and impression taking courses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, initially I was off work for a few months as dentistry shut down and I really missed going to work. A lot of work communication was done via Zoom/Teams. It was also particularly difficult for the students who were due to qualify, and it impacted their experiences. The pandemic affected their examination process, qualifying and graduation. Since returning to work it was challenging teaching and working with the new PPE FFP3, donning and doffing procedures and daily changing standard operating procedures (SOPs) that we had to follow. Then it was a challenge stopping it all again and getting back to normal! The pandemic did enable me to learn a new skill by taking part in training and providing COVID and flu vaccinations to our staff.

I love treating patients, being able to have a calming influence on them and being able to acclimatise anxious patients so that they become accepting of treatment and less fearful so they can walk out with a smile. It makes my job fulfilling.

I see a lot of patients with autism, learning difficulties, wheelchair patients, bariatric patients and those with complex medical histories. Behaviour management is the most challenging part of my job and trying to find out what works for your patient. Everyone is



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so diverse, and one approach does not fit all so it’s about adapting. It can be exhausting mentally.

Bridgewater NHS Foundation Trust is a large community service covering a wide area. We have a large team with many varied job roles. The network ensures community dental services are available to a combined population of over two million people. The community dental network provides specialised dental care on referral to people of all ages, disabilities and those with special needs which make it impossible for them to access treatment from an NHS family dentist.

Depending on which site I work at I can be home by 5.20 pm or after 6 pm. This all depends on whether the motorway is clear!

Outside work I sing in a band called Spitting Feathers and practise once a week. I have two cats and like to go walking and discover waterfalls in Wales and the Lake District with my husband.

At the weekend all of our time has been taken up decorating our new home, but we

enjoy going to the cinema, out for meals, to gigs and spending time with friends and family.

In July my husband and I went on our belated honeymoon to Mauritius where we were lucky enough to swim with dolphins, see sperm whales and travel round all parts of the island, even visiting their famous waterfall Chamarel (see photo).

Regarding my career, there’s always more to learn and with dentistry it never stops. I would like to see exemptions be passed and also for dental therapists to be able to work more autonomously within the NHS. A diploma in paediatrics and completing an Advanced Clinical Practice (ACP) in Oral Healthcare is the direction I would most like to head in next.

The three things I could not live without are vinegar (!), music, and the freedom to be outdoors.

Interview by Kate Quinlan

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