



‘Dental nursing gave me a kick start’

Student dental hygienist and therapist **Aisha Mehmood** is a new recruit to *BDJ Team’s* reader panel. In this article Aisha describes her route into dentistry so far.

My name is Aisha and I am 23-years-old. I am a second year Dental Hygiene & Therapy student at the University of Manchester.

I have been in the dental field for almost five years. I started as a confused teenager, not knowing what path to take after college. From a young age I wanted to become a dentist or doctor. Unfortunately, I did not go down the A-Level route to do so. I believed I had made a mistake choosing to study a BTEC in Medical Science, as all the options I had for further education did not catch my eye. I was very much a philomath and always had a strong desire to learn. I was worried I would choose a degree that I would not like, so I chose to take a gap year and focus on myself, travel and relax – giving me time to gather my thoughts and decide what route to take.

I remember having a positive experience at the dentist as a child. I would look at the dental nurses in awe and appreciate how at ease they made me feel. My mother was always adamant about making sure we had a low sugar intake, and always brushed our teeth. At the time it was frustrating, but I thank her now, as I never required any restorations as a child. Sometimes I do wish I had, so I could sympathise with patients on a more personal level.

During my gap year I applied to study undergraduate English. My heart was towards science, but I felt as though I was running out of time, and outside pressure caused me to make an uninformed decision. During this time I

saw a job advert for a trainee dental nurse at a practice minutes away from home. I impulsively applied, unaware that this was to be my turning point. I got the job and decided not to start my English degree.

My gap year had caused me severe social anxiety, and at first it was very difficult to fit in to my new workplace. I learnt things very quickly though, and put my heart into my dental nursing coursework. I received so much support and am forever grateful to everyone at the practice for helping me through this journey. I developed independence and confidence within myself.

Although dental nursing is a great career, I quickly learnt it was not for me. Before I started nursing, I did not even know what a dental therapist was. A lot of nurses do not get the opportunity to work with dental therapists as closely as I did; this helped me set my mind on progressing further. I particularly enjoyed nursing for composite restorations and periodontal treatment. During my apprenticeship I juggled my dental nursing coursework and an Access to Higher Education course in college. This was during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a lot had changed with the way we worked in dentistry. It was intense, but I worked hard to achieve my nursing qualification and distinctions in my Access course to apply to university.

I was aware of how difficult it is to get a place on a dental hygiene and therapy course. With over 400 applicants each year, and only 12–20 seats available, I talked myself into calmly accepting rejection. Which is what I did get,

from all the universities I applied to except the last: Manchester. The offer message on my UCAS was a shock. I was over the moon!

I feel so lucky and grateful that I am studying at Manchester, especially as it was my first time applying. I was expecting to have to reapply the following year.

It is great here! A small cohort means we get more attention, and are almost a family. I love that it is a very hands-on course; we are taught alongside the BDS students, so we get the best of both worlds. This year we have started seeing our own patients in the University Dental Hospital.

I feel as though dental nursing gave me a kick start, especially in knowing how to communicate with patients. I have learnt much more than I could have imagined in the space of a year.

My future plans are possibly to complete postgraduate training after I graduate. Then, my dream is to work with both adults and children and progress into a private dental practice. I would love to go on outreach to lower socioeconomic countries and offer treatment to families suffering in poverty. I want to aid the present and future needs of patients, enjoying the challenge of a lifetime of learning. My journey was not a straight one, but if I could find a way, I’m sure anyone can.

Editor’s note: We are delighted to have Aisha on our reader panel and look forward to hearing more about her experiences as a DCP student.

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