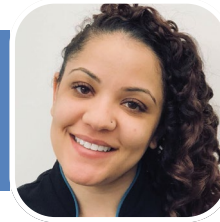




# Why do some dental nurses stay in unsatisfactory jobs?



If dental nurses aren't happy with their jobs

and/or their working conditions, why do they stay in dental nursing? Dental nurse **Rebecca Silver**<sup>1</sup> considers.

**H**aving and maintaining a successful dental practice can usually be attributed to how happy the staff who work there are. According to a survey on job satisfaction conducted by Indeed,<sup>1</sup> the UK sits at 12<sup>th</sup> in the employee satisfaction table with 74% of respondents claiming to be satisfied at work. However, 33% of respondents were unhappy with work, with only 22% of the age group 18–24-year-olds saying they are happy with work.

But what can cause someone to become unhappy or unsatisfied with a job, yet they still continue to work there? This article will attempt to answer the question: 'Although potentially unhappy and unsatisfied, why do some dental nurses stay in jobs instead of leaving the workplace?'

Dental nurses (DNs) are often the lowest

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paid members of the dental team, yet you could argue they are the backbone and control centre of the day to day running of a dental practice, with many dental nurses having been cross trained in reception tasks, administrative work, treatment co-ordination and taking on the role of infection control lead, as well as their dental nursing duties. Due to this added pressure and the general burden of a job in dentistry, some dental nurses decide to leave the profession or train for another dental role. But why do some DN's never seem to be happy, but don't leave what they would call an unhappy job?

### Loyalty

Loyalty is very important to a dental practice. Having loyal staff benefits the practice due to patients seeing the same team members and having people assist and work on them who know their full history, including dental, medical and social, meaning that patients will return. This patient loyalty can also benefit the practice as some patients will tell family and friends about their time and treatment at the practice and recommend them. But staff loyalty is important for this to occur. Some DN's feel a sense of loyalty to their patients and they don't want to leave them during treatment, especially if there is a rapport between the staff member and patient. It can be daunting telling patients you are leaving, especially if you have been at the practice a long time and have grown older with your patients. DN's may also feel loyal to their colleagues. Working in an unsatisfactory job role doesn't mean that every part of the job is difficult or causes unhappiness. Day to day colleagues can be some of the closest friendships in the industry and when you work closely with people, especially clinicians, for eight to ten hours a day, you can end up putting their feelings before your own. This feeling of loyalty and not wanting to affect your friends may explain why some DN's do not leave jobs. There could also be a loyalty to the practice because of longevity; first in, last out can be important if a dental practice is struggling to stay open in the current climate and the thought of changing jobs in this climate can be daunting.

The practice may have a perceived loyalty to the DN and therefore although there may be issues or problems at work, the practice are happy to help or manage situations so staff do not leave. Especially as it can cost the practice more money in hiring new staff and training them to work within that practice. If the practice can placate a lot of the DN's feelings or attitudes, or work to fix them and make necessary

changes, then this can be perceived as the practice not wanting to lose a valuable member of staff. It could also be because they do not have the time or finances to train new staff.

### Wages

Wages have the potential to become a very contentious topic within dentistry, and especially with DN's. DN's are often the lowest paid members of staff with the added pressure of paying the same Annual Retention Fee (ARF) as other, higher paid roles in dentistry. But, some employers pay their DN's very well compared to other practices, and sometimes it is enough for the DN to maybe tolerate some bad feelings of the job in order to continue receiving the good wage. Conversely, the pay may only be minimum wage, but they are unable to get a new job that suits their needs. Being employed is also a guaranteed income and although the DN may not be happy with their pay it is a regular income that they can base expenses around. However, statistics show that the average UK employee is willing to take a 10.5% pay cut in order to improve their own happiness.<sup>1</sup>

### Lack of job opportunities

Depending on where the practice is based, job opportunities may be few and therefore a DN may not have the option to relocate to another practice. Or there are practices available but they do not remunerate for the level of skill that the DN has and thus it does not make sense to leave the practice they are currently at.

### Home life

Depending on the home life of the DN it may not be possible to leave a job, especially if they are the only person in the household with a regular income. The DN may have children or other people depending on them, meaning that their pay is very important to the household. The importance of this money may be why a

DN stays in a job that they are unhappy in.

### Convenience

Although some DN's may have other reasons for staying at a job, you cannot discount the convenience of the practice location or hours of the practice causing DN's to stay in certain roles. Especially if they are part time, or if they have to work weekends or evenings. The time and cost of travel will also have an effect on whether DN's leave, especially if they are based in areas with high public transport costs, or rural areas. Employees are used to paying out some of their pay for transport costs, however, this is a subject matter that is more important to other DN's, especially if they aren't able to secure a pay rise, or even another job.

In conclusion, there are many reasons that a DN may stay in a job that they are not happy in, especially if there are other people depending on them. Loyalty to colleagues and patients is a strong reason why they would not leave, especially if they are a long-term member of staff.

### What do you think?

Are you happy or unhappy with your dental nursing job, or with dental nurse working conditions generally? Do you plan to remain in dentistry or move to a new industry? Let us know what you think. Write to [bdjteam@nature.com](mailto:bdjteam@nature.com) or send a message through our Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/bdjteam](https://www.facebook.com/bdjteam).

### References

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