



Saying 'yes' to every opportunity



After over 30 years in dentistry, **Letitia Choudhury** is the first dental nurse to be a NHSE Dental Clinical Leadership Fellow. Letitia shares her career story with *BDJ Team* readers.

In 1989 I was an out of work receptionist and you could say I accidentally joined the dental profession. I applied for a dental receptionist role at a local practice but having no prior dental experience the owner/operator asked me to train in the surgery with him for six months. The idea was for me to then be able to work on reception armed with some dental knowledge. During those six months, even though we were a super busy practice, I wasn't put off. I fell in love with the fast-paced work, and teeth, and have never looked back!

I have now worked in dentistry for over 30 years. I have seen dental nurses go from being known as 'dental surgery assistants' to being given the title of 'dental nurses' and have seen

the professional registration of dental nurses and the resulting recognition and career opportunities this has enabled.

During that time, I gained my National

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Certificate and post registration certificates in dental radiography and dental sedation. My dental nursing roles have always contained at least an element of sedation nursing or general anaesthesia (GA) and this is a special interest for me. I worked for many years assisting the oral surgery and IV sedation lists and GA lists (prior to 2001) in a busy and lively sedation practice and loved every minute.

was launched too, so this also fell into my hands! I learnt so much during that period of my career and a lot of faith was placed in me by Michael, the practice owner.

I joined Community Dental Services-CIC (CDS) as a senior dental nurse (SDN) in 2016 and, working with an amazing and supportive team, I settled in quickly. I loved the combination of management, administration and dental nursing; we do such varied work

the dental workforce, CORE20+5 and the advancing dental care report. All the projects have stretched my abilities to the max; I have had to learn many new skills along the way and I have grown my confidence exponentially. Now the year has ended, we are handing the projects over to the mentors and maybe new fellows. I hope to continue to give some support to the projects I have been involved in. I will be submitting a research paper to a journal very soon that has been developed from one of my joint projects this year. Very soon we will be launching a pilot project to create a Dental Care Professionals Network group in the East Midlands – the idea is to pilot it here and hopefully grow it to other areas in the future.

HEE encourages fellows to enter further study, so after much deliberation and self-doubt, I applied for a postgraduate certificate course in medical and healthcare education. Although the requirements were a 2:1 in an undergraduate degree, I emailed the university to ask whether they thought I might be accepted on to the course. They were supportive of the idea, so I applied for this on the strength of my work experience and was so amazed, pleased and privileged to be offered a place to start in September 2023.

I have just started a new role in CDS as the clinical governance lead for Bedfordshire and have also volunteered to be involved with our workforce development team for the coming year to gain more experience in education, training and teaching to help support my academic studies. I have always enjoyed seeing fellow dental nurses advancing and enriching their careers with further study and am excited to be able to support this in some way.

I have just completed my final presentation for the Fellowship year: our projects were presented in front of the great and good of NHSE Midlands, including the Associate Dental Dean for FDs and fellows, our project mentors, LDN chairs and committees, past fellows, Dental Foundation programme trainers and our CEO at CDS, to name a few!

I'm now looking forward to starting my one year postgraduate certificate in healthcare education and who knows where I will be heading this time next year?

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I wanted to grow my career and heard about the role of the dental hygienist; however, financially the study involved wasn't possible as I needed an income. I decided a good way to develop might be as a dental practice manager and eventually the opportunity arose when I was working for a corporate dental company. I learnt so much in this role as I was really thrown in at the deep end and quickly realised that I had to either sink or swim. I lasted almost two years before making the difficult decision to leave that role. Trying to combine the practice management role part-time with a young family to look after was too much.

I left that role in 2010 when a previous employer offered me a job and I became the unofficial CQC application lead. I assessed the three practices for compliance so the CQC registration could be applied for and attained – and they all later passed their inspections. This all took at least two years in preparation, carefully going through each CQC outcome and supporting information and checking every policy and procedure was in place and how we could demonstrate compliance. It was painstaking but immersive and strangely enjoyable work. In addition to the full compliance report I created an 'easy read' handbook for the practice owner. During this role the 'IG toolkit' [Information Governance]

it never gets boring and our clinic teams are so helpful. I especially love doing my GA sessions each week at the local hospital.

Last year I made a decision to say 'yes' to every opportunity that came my way. I started by volunteering for additional projects and did an audit on our wellness provision in the company; I also volunteered to join the service transformation team, where we work on small projects to improve our working life in CDS.

The opportunity arose within CDS to apply for the very first dental nurse place on the Health Education England (HEE) (Now renamed as NHS England – Midlands [WT&E]) Dental Leadership Fellowship secondment for one year. I had no idea what a 'dental leadership fellow' was but I applied anyway with the support of my employers and I am really glad I did. It meant juggling two roles: my SDN role was reduced down to three days per week and the fellowship was two days per week. It has been challenging but I have proven to myself I can do it and thrive.

During this fellowship year I have worked on three big projects and one smaller workstream; three of these were with other leadership fellows. The projects were for the Local Dental Networks (LDN) in the Midlands, working towards NHS priorities of promoting, growing and supporting

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