

# ‘Rest assured, this is just the beginning’

We meet high-flying dental hygienist turned coach **Siobhán Kelleher**, who has recently launched a Diploma in Oral and Positive Health (Level 7).

## Introduction

*BDJ Team approached Siobhán Kelleher to appear in our continuing education themed issue as she is a dental hygienist who has gone on to complete numerous qualifications, become a coach, and launch her own company. We asked Siobhán to tell us more about her background and also conducted an interview.*

## Siobhán:

‘I have always been passionate about oral health and its impact on overall wellbeing. Over the years, I have pursued various qualifications and experiences to enhance my skills in this field.

I completed a Master’s degree in Personal and Management Coaching. This qualification has not only expanded my knowledge in coaching techniques but has also equipped me with valuable skills in effectively communicating with patients and colleagues and promoting positive behavioural changes.

Additionally, I have become a qualified facilitator, enabling me to conduct workshops and training sessions. This role has allowed me to share my expertise with others and contribute to the professional development of dental hygienists and other healthcare professionals.

Furthermore, I have completed a postgraduate diploma in Positive Health with the Royal College of Surgeons. This specialised training has provided me with a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between oral health and overall wellbeing. It has also equipped me with the necessary tools to promote a holistic approach

to dental hygiene.

There is currently no dental postgraduate training available in Ireland specifically tailored for dental hygienists. This gap in professional development opportunities motivated me to take matters into my own hands. I embarked on a mission to become a course provider accredited by Eduqual, a recognised accreditation body.

I am thrilled to announce that our efforts have paid off, and we have successfully developed our first accredited course, the Diploma in Oral and Positive Health (Level 7). This course aims to bridge the gap in postgraduate training for dental hygienists in Ireland and provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to excel in their profession. This diploma is open to the UK also and to dentists in both countries.

The Diploma in Oral and Positive Health (Level 7) covers a wide range of topics, including advanced oral hygiene techniques, patient communication, behaviour change strategies, and the integration of positive health principles into dental practice. This comprehensive programme will empower dental hygienists and dentists to deliver exceptional care and contribute to the overall wellbeing of their patients.

I am excited about this new venture and the positive impact it will have on the dental hygiene community in Ireland and the UK. Rest assured, this is just the beginning, as we have plans to develop more accredited courses in the future to further enhance the professional development opportunities for dental professionals.’



### Interview

*What were your career ambitions when you were still at school?*

**Siobhán:** I wanted to be a social worker. When I went to study this subject, I realised quickly the world was very different to the bubble I had been living in. I persuaded my parents to let me take a year out. They felt I was very young to be dealing with the content of the course and agreed.

*How did you first come to work in a dental practice?*

My mother said to take the year out, I had to work towards some qualification. I had a dental appointment and thought it looked interesting. I applied for a dental receptionist role.

While working as a dental receptionist, I was asked to help out in the surgery one afternoon. A child came in with a fractured incisal edge. The mother and child were distraught. We got to work, and it was incredible to see the tooth restored and the happiness and relief from the mother and the child. That was it. I wanted to be in the surgery.

I applied for a trainee dental nurse role. I loved the role. I progressed into a management role, which was demanding but rewarding. I missed the surgery and wanted to be more hands-on, so I applied for dental hygiene. My employer at the time, Robert Jamieson, encouraged me. He was an incredible dentist and businessman and I hold those days in my memory as the gold standard of dentistry.

*Did you enjoy working as a fully qualified dental hygienist?*

When I first went to live in London I couldn't find the proper practice. I knew what the gold standards were and I couldn't settle for less. I eventually found a fantastic practice, Ultrasmile. My surgery was over the Limehouse marina. I had an intraoral camera, all the latest equipment, films on the TV, and long appointments, and it was a beautiful environment. The team were incredible. I relocated to Manchester and found another practice and the fantastic team at James Hull in St Ann's Square.

I love working as a dental hygienist. I was often encouraged to go and study dentistry but I didn't want to. I was so happy in my role. I integrated treatment coordination into my role and was trained by Bobbi Anthony.

I then relocated to Ireland. There were no positions when I relocated. I knocked on doors and eventually persuaded Kevin O'Brien to let me rent a surgery in his practice. He agreed to do the referrals.



*‘I became intrigued with group coaching, and I knew support and connection brought better results. I felt more needed to be done...’*

Dental hygiene differs in Ireland: when I relocated, I couldn't take impressions or do tooth whitening, and this hasn't changed ten years later. It is a registered profession but CPD is not mandatory yet!

*Can you outline your experience as a coach?*

Shoulder pain has haunted me over the past 15 years. At first, it was one-to-one coaching in various practices. In dentistry, we must have the up-to-date evidence when treating

patients. I wanted to know more about coaching and what the evidence was that could enhance practice management.

I became intrigued with group coaching, and I knew support and connection brought better results. I co-founded the NSK Ikgiai Oral Hygiene Programme. I felt more needed to be done. There were several courses out there but dental team support and care were non-existent. How can we show up and advise patients when we are not in a good place ourselves? We set about incorporating this

into the courses we created. When COVID hit we gathered educators to support graduates. We put on webinars and set up Facebook and Instagram groups to support. It has continued, and we do live hands-on courses, webinars, podcasts and more.

*Did you undertake the Master's degree in Personal & Management Coaching (at University College Cork) while continuing in your day job?*

Yes! I was working in practice and leading the NSK Ikgiai team. When I look back, I don't know how I did it. It's a bit of a blur!

*In 2023 you completed the Professional diploma in positive health, lifestyle medicine with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI). Can you tell us more about this qualification?*

A postgraduate diploma in positive health combines lifestyle medicine and positive psychology. It is estimated it will cost governments 43 trillion dollars (US) to treat non-communicable diseases by 2030. Where will the money come from and where are the healthcare professionals to treat these patients? There was something missing for me between my clinical work and the coaching and this appealed to me as soon as I read the description. It was the missing piece of the puzzle. I also studied Facilitation to enhance group training.

*Is this what inspired you to launch your own Diploma in Oral and Positive Health (Level 7)?*

There was not one mention of dentistry in the course. We are treating an inflammatory disease and are well placed to reach patients about their health. 'Making Every Contact Count' was launched by NHS England and I thought dentistry could contribute and we could look at our appointment system and treatment differently. I also wanted to include an academic unit because as soon as I pick up an article, I think we need to educate dental professionals to write better and skip opinions. This diploma is packed full of up-to-date, evidence-based content. It includes self-development. Learners will write assignments, a case study and an academic poster – small-scale research. Watch out for them next year at a conference near you.

*Do you miss working clinically in practice?*

I will do a few hours again early next year. I haven't had time to miss it yet. I do a lot of hands-on training, so it keeps me tuned in.

### Why would you encourage dental professionals in Ireland and the UK to undertake your Diploma?

When I went back to study at the postgraduate level, I was clueless and had to start from scratch. I have included dedicated units to academic writing to start the journey in a positive, relaxed way. It is a journey of looking at the science and the care of our patients in a different and forward-thinking way. I believe education builds confidence, and I'm already witnessing the power unfold over the last few weeks. I provide a safe and supportive environment and provide the best professional speakers in the industry.

### Do you think this qualification could improve dental hygienists' careers and career prospects in Ireland?

We have dentists, too! This is the first course of its kind globally, and I would see these learners in demand to do research or that they might want to work in the commercial world providing clinical expertise to companies. Some have special interests and will develop them further. A few have expressed an interest in further study already.

There are 11 students in the first cohort and about 20 already signed up for next year.

### What other courses might you introduce in the future?

We are launching a PG Certificate in The Principles and Practice of Mentoring in Dentistry (Level 5) in the new year.

I am excited about this new venture and the positive impact it will have on the dental community in Ireland and the UK. Rest assured, this is just the beginning, as we have plans to develop more accredited courses in the future to further enhance the professional development opportunities for dental professionals. There are plans for practice management and a dental nurse programme.

### What are your other work commitments at the moment?

I am the clinical and project lead for the NSK Ikigai Oral Hygiene Programme. We have 18 educators, so it's busy coordinating the team. I have been an educator on the TePe education team for ten years, so I visit universities on their behalf.

### You must have a hectic working week!

I call it the busy season Feb–May and then Sep–Nov. I'm out and about lecturing, presenting, training and a bit of socialising too. It can get hectic. I love having the summer as a wind-down. I'm a summer person.

### Any exciting plans for the coming year?

My conference 'The Magic of Education' is a finalist for the event of the year. Now in its ninth year, I am very proud and we are going bigger next year on 9 March 2024 in Limerick, Ireland.

### Is it tricky juggling work and family life?

Yes! I have a little boy, Tom. He plays a lot of sports and his dad Anthony coaches one of his teams so they are great buddies. I am lucky my husband can work from home.

### What are your hobbies and interests outside dentistry?

I like walking up the fields with my dogs Thanos and Diego. They are Maltese and adorable little characters.

I like to paint but haven't done enough lately. I recently visited Amsterdam and was in my element in the art museums. I write poetry and I love design. I love making clips on Canva and sending them to my friends. I get in my flow and it's my way of relaxing. I also love a Prosecco.

More information about Siobhán's courses can be found at <https://Siobhankelleher.com/>.

Interview by Kate Quinlan

### Siobhán is presenting at the following upcoming events:

- 17–18 November 2023, Irish Dental Hygienists' Association Conference, supporting implant training, Portlaoise, Ireland
- 24–25 November 2023, Oral Health Conference (OHC), British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy, Bournemouth
- 9 March 2024, The Magic of Education, Siobhán Kelleher Coaching, Limerick, Ireland
- 14–15 March 2024, Alternative Professions Conference
- 25 April 2024 Irish Dental Association, supporting implant training
- 1 June 2024, Scottish Dental Show

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