



The green dream team: caring simultaneously for patients and planet

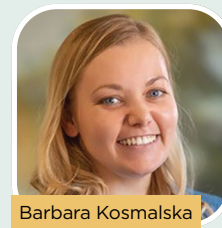
BDJ Team hears how team members at the Dove Holistic Dental Centre in Bognor Regis minimise their environmental impact.

Easy talking points are essential in any dental practice, especially for the anxious new patient. Topics that distract patients and diminish their anxieties help defuse stress and make everyone's job easier. At the Dove Holistic Dental Centre (DHDC), there are many talking points. Outstandingly, perhaps, is the hallway mirror. In winter, patients are intrigued to find that the reception area warms up as they enter and yet there is no visible sign of a radiator. Learning that the room is heated by infra-red mirrors on the walls and by ceiling panels is a great conversation starter.

When practice principal Davinder Raju was developing his eco practice in 2017, it was a new-build and he had the luxury of choosing the greenest products and systems; but of greater value, he says, was the opportunity to choose colleagues who shared his vision and aims. Together they work as a team to ensure that the DHDC has a minimal impact on the environment.

Since establishing DHDC, he has put his knowledge and experience to good use. He has created a programme for dental practice owners who want to make their own sustainable journey, but don't have the time to start from scratch. The Greener Dentistry Global (GDG) accreditation programme was launched in 2023.

One of GDG's key recommendations is to appoint a sustainability champion. But so great is the commitment of the team at DHDC, everyone champions sustainability. Three staff members share key roles. Barbara Kosmalska, the practice manager, Dr Tessa Brumder, an associate dentist and Erika Žakavičiūtė, a dental nurse.



Barbara Kosmalska

Barbara is responsible for ordering practice supplies. Given that procurement accounts for approximately 19% of a practice's CO₂

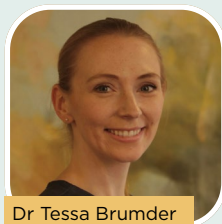
emissions, it's an important role. She researches to ensure that what she buys is always the most eco-friendly option, looking at chemical content, packaging and country of origin. She bulk buys compostable toothbrushes so they can sell them at cost to patients.

Barbara says patients are positive and interested in all the efforts the practice makes. The only negative feedback was when the practice went paperless. Older patients liked to have their appointment cards but have adapted.

Among the staff there are no negatives. Barbara says: 'It's so nice to work alongside others who care. This is not about empty slogans, what we are doing makes a difference.'

Tessa (Dr Tessa) agrees. When she was interviewed for an associate position by

Davinder, she was heartened to find they shared similar views on clinical dentistry and on sustainability. 'It's really different here. We do really care for people and for the planet.'



Dr Tessa Brumder

For instance, Dr Tessa says the team decided they could go a step further with reducing their energy use. Currently, while the heating is controlled by zoned

thermostats, in the reception area there are multiple pieces of equipment plugged into the mains.

'At a practice meeting we looked at our energy consumption to see if we could cut down. We decided to turn the power off to all non-essential equipment at lunchtime. We have been doing this for nearly a year and can see there has been a massive reduction in our electricity use.'

Tessa says that using disposable or plastic items is mostly laziness and doesn't happen at DHDC. Metal tips and impression trays are autoclaved and reused. 'In the practice we are all passionate about sustainability. We all feel a sense of responsibility. Anything we can do to replace plastic is done straight away, regardless of the expense.'

At dental school Tessa worried about how wasteful dentistry is and how much domestic plastic ends up in the ocean, never to degrade, or, in the case of clinical waste, is incinerated, releasing harmful toxins and polluting the air.

She is relieved to be in a practice where, instead of buying harmful disinfecting products, the team at DHDC produce their own hypochlorous acid. It's a little more work but better for the team's health and less wasteful than buying individually packaged products.

'Something else we have voted and agreed on is to have days when we only bring in vegetarian packed lunches.' Since they have been doing this, she says she has found her meat consumption at home reducing dramatically.

Erika has also found that her routines at work are impacting her home life positively.

She joined the practice four years ago, her first role after finishing her NEBDN

training course. She lives in Portsmouth and has a long commute by train but says it's worth it.

'It's really lovely to be surrounded by people who are mindful of the planet and who want



Cristina Lungu, Erika Žakavičiūtė, Subpreet Dhillon-Raju, Davinder Raju, Laura Suarez, Tessa Brumder

'An example of a small change is composting food waste. We do this in the practice with waste from packed lunches and now I do it at home.'

to work together to be eco-friendly. I feel the responsibility to be more sustainable adds a valuable new dimension to my dental nursing role.'

There is so much waste in dentistry, she says. 'It would be easy to feel overwhelmed. But I believe in small changes and that if everyone makes small changes we can make a difference.'

An example of one such change is the sterilisation process. 'It takes an hour for one set of instruments to go through the autoclave and washer disinfectant. I open up the pouch at the end of the process so the paper can be removed and recycled and I make a point of switching off all the equipment.'

We ask her to describe activities that were new to her when she joined DHDC. 'An example of a small change is composting food waste. We do this in the practice with waste from packed lunches and now I do it at home. Also, at home, I always double-check that nothing is left on standby.'

She has volunteered to lead the DHDC community engagement agenda. The first charity she has reached out to is a rescue centre for cats. Several of the team are knitting toy mice to amuse the cats! But they are actively looking for other good causes; DHDC is on the sea front in Bognor Regis and they have discussed getting together for a clean-up of the beach.

The staff we spoke to all mentioned how inspired they are by Davinder and his wife, Subpreet, and their commitment to

sustainability. Erika says: 'It's really nice to have Davinder guiding us and helping us understand more, although the more I learn, the more I realise how much more there is to understand!'

It's a well-known slogan in dentistry, that 'teamwork makes the dream work' and this is certainly true at DHDC; all the team know that sustainability raises the bar and makes their working lives more purposeful.

Top tips from DHDC team members

- Replace disposable items with an autoclavable alternative
- Separate the practice waste
- Audit clinical waste to see if there are more environmentally friendly or reusable options
- Encourage all trips to the dental practice to be on foot, bike or public transport
- Unplug any power supplies when not in use
- Compost any food waste
- Contribute to the local community
- Keep all activity under review – is there a greener way to do this?
- Keep sustainability on the practice meeting agenda
- Inspire and inform patients.

Find out more at <https://greenerdentistry.global>.

By Caroline Holland

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