



**'I'm excited to explore more learning opportunities'**

Margarita Marynich was awarded the Ann Felton Scholarship, gaining a free place on the British Dental Association's (BDA's) Oral Health Education (OHE) course. Margarita qualified as an oral health educator in March 2022. The BDA's **Anne-Marie Moisley** spoke to Margarita about the opportunities the OHE qualification led to.

#### Introduction

According to the World Health Organisation, 'Good oral health is essential in our daily lives, it contributes to our overall health and well-being and gives us confidence in interacting with others' (WHO, 2022).

The value of having a qualified oral health educator in a practice is overlooked and often still not even considered in 2024! Oral health education is an essential service needed in dental practices – this has been confirmed by the realisation that a healthy mouth is essential for a healthy life.

For dental nurses, training to be an oral health educator not only provides personal and professional development but enables them to bring new services to their practices.

#### Interview

*When did you qualify as a dental nurse?*

**Margarita:** My journey in dentistry started in 2016 when I worked as a dental receptionist. Watching the daily operations sparked my interest. After becoming a dental nurse in 2019 I pursued extra qualifications in dental radiography and in OHE.

*How did you feel when you found out that you had won the BDA Scholarship?*

Winning the scholarship filled me with joy and gratitude. It was a moment of validation, where all the hard work and dedication I had poured into my studies felt truly recognised and appreciated.

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*Do you feel your OHE qualification has benefitted you?*

Yes, the general dental nursing qualification doesn't go into enough depth; it only covers the basics. So gaining the OHE qualification helped my confidence, expanded my knowledge and improved my ability to teach people about oral health in a way that made a difference, especially during my volunteer work in Cambodia. It also helped me get into university.

*What interesting projects have you been involved in since qualifying?*

I am very proud to have graduated as a dental hygienist in 2023 and am currently studying to become a dental therapist. I'm excited to explore more learning opportunities to enhance my expertise and dedication to improving oral health care.

*You achieved your dream and successfully volunteered with Dentaid The Dental Charity. Why did you volunteer?*

When I first signed up for the OHE Scholarship, volunteering seemed like a distant dream. However, through hard work, determination, and the support of others, I turned that dream into a reality. I do feel an overwhelming sense of pride and accomplishment.

Volunteering with Dentaid provided an opportunity to give to those who lack access to regular dental care, to make a meaningful difference. Moreover, it offered a sense of purpose to my profession, reminding me of the profound impact dental health can have on overall well-being. Despite challenges, the Cambodian people's resilience and warmth left a lasting impression on me and I am grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of their community, however short.

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*How did the OHE qualification help you in Cambodia?*

Despite facing language barriers, my OHE qualification helped me to plan my oral health instructions by setting clear aims and objectives. Succinct planning and the use of simple visual aids proved beneficial, particularly when teaching children.

*What did you do in Cambodia?*

The first week, we went to a rural area in Kampong Speu province. There, we set up a walk-in service in a church to help local people with their dental needs. We used mobile dental equipment to provide essential services.





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In the second week, we went to Samlout province where our focus was teaching primary and secondary school kids about taking care of their teeth and providing preventative treatment. We also did interactive sessions to teach good dental hygiene habits.

*The working conditions must have been challenging, what was the most difficult?*

Managing moisture control without a suction unit was challenging; we asked patients to spit frequently! This experience helped us learn basic Khmer words, enabling effective communication with the local community.

*What was the highlight of your trip?*

The highlight was the genuine gratitude of the people and realising the tangible difference we were making. One touching moment was when a patient expressed immense gratitude to a therapist, explaining that she’s getting married next year and can now smile freely, thanks to the dental care we provided. It was

heartwarming to see firsthand the impact our efforts had on improving the lives and confidence of those we treated.

*How has the qualification changed you personally?*

The qualification heightened my awareness of what makes an effective oral health educator. Moreover, it significantly helped my progress during my foundation degree course, propelling me forward in becoming a dental hygienist.

*As a qualified oral health educator what would you like to do next?*

I am considering volunteering again, with a particular focus on educating children about oral health. I strongly believe that by instilling good habits from a young age, we can contribute to a brighter and healthier future.

*In recommending the BDA OHE course to a friend or colleague, what would you say?*

I would highly recommend the course due to

its well-structured curriculum and effective delivery. It has a lot to offer. Its valuable content and structured approach make it a worthwhile investment for anyone interested in oral health education.

### Further information

#### Oral Health Education for dental care professionals

The BDA’s Oral Health Education programme was developed in partnership with OHE Southwest. This flexible, online programme will help dental nurses or other DCPs to learn the communication skills needed to educate your patients about their oral health.

Designed for busy DCPs in a clear, concise and interactive format, you will be required to complete 27 modules, seven quizzes and a practice test over a period of eight weeks. Students will then be expected to complete a Practical Portfolio. You will be given approximately four months to complete the practical work.

Once the Portfolio has been completed to the required standard, students will then sit an online examination.

The course leads to the nationally recognised BDA Education Certificate in Oral Health Education, which qualifies you to work as an Oral Health Educator within your practice.

#### OHE Ann Felton Scholarship

The Ann Felton Scholarship was created in memory of Ann Felton (1942–2007) who set up her own oral health education school and later developed the online course with the BDA.

Information about this year’s Ann Felton Scholarship will be live on the BDA website this April. To find out more and to apply, visit <https://www.bda.org/learning-and-development/courses-for-dcps/>.

The BDA also offers the BDA Education Certificate in Dental Radiography.

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