'Hospital dental nursing is so rewarding'

Hospital dental nurse **Liz Fuller** won our competition at Dental Showcase 2009 to be a *Vital* cover star.

'Would you like to be a *Vital* cover star?'

This is the question that the *Vital* team asked passing visitors to the *Vital*/BDJ stand at the BDTA Dental Showcase held at Birmingham NEC in November 2009. With our large prop – a blown-up *Vital* cover with a hole cut out to put your head through – we photographed dental care professionals from across the UK. Okay, the size of the 'head hole' didn't really fit with the size of the body pictured on the cover (or that oversized hand!) but the exercise was a lot of fun. Thank you to everyone who took part!

Pictured here (bottom of page) are some of our budding cover stars saying 'cheese'.

One particularly enthusiastic participant in the cover competition was Liz Fuller, who had travelled to Birmingham from Derby with her colleagues including Catherine Webster, Gail Telford and Gemma Bennett. Liz told us that about seven DCPs from her department travelled to Dental Showcase to visit the stands and attend the radiography lecture. 'We found it useful talking to the many reps about the products we already purchase and new products coming into the market,' said Liz. 'It was a long day and we must have walked miles!'

Liz challenged us as to whether a hospital dental nurse had appeared on the cover of *Vital* before and welcomed us to visit her at her workplace, the Head and Neck Unit at the Royal Derby Hospital.

We realised that indeed, we hadn't photographed a hospital dental nurse before, and furthermore, Liz really stood out among the other entrants to the competition. So, in chilly January this year the *Vital* team and our photographer Filip travelled to Derby, a first for a *Vital* photoshoot as normally we stay in the South-East. The impressive results

grace these pages and of course the cover of this issue.

Liz was also kind enough to be interviewed so that we could all learn a bit more about her and her life as a hospital dental nurse.

Becoming a dental nurse

Liz, 37, lives in Mickleover, Derby, with her husband Mark and their two daughters Rebecca and Pippa. She is a dental nurse at the Head and Neck Unit at the Royal Derby Hospital. Apart from her job she loves reading, cooking and lazy days spent with

her family. First of all she told *Vital* about her route to dentistry.

I left school at 16 and did my dental nurse training straight away. I went to a careers evening and a local dental practice were looking for a school leaver to join their practice, and I signed up. In 1997 I went on to do my oral health education course and have since completed the dental nurse radiography course at Charles Clifford Dental Hospital.

I really enjoyed my dental nurse training. The course was held once a week during the evening, for three hours. It was quite hard after a long day at work but everyone was in the same boat. I enjoyed meeting with the other girls and discussing (and gossiping!) about the places they had worked and the training experiences they were going through. I was fortunate that the practice I was working in had just opened and we had all new equipment and surgeries. The two dentists were recently qualified and very supportive of my training. They set up visits for us to look at the most recent x-ray equipment at the time and we also visited a local dental laboratory.

My dental radiography course was the most challenging training I have had. I found the physics element the hardest.

Working in general practice

I worked in an NHS/private general practice for many years. My boss at that time decided that he wanted to concentrate on orthodontics so he left the practice to further his training and pursue specialisation. At that point I left as well to go to a specialist orthodontic practice in Derby. I worked with Steven Clark, a consultant orthodontist who divides his time between Nottingham Queen's Medical Centre (QMC) and the specialist practice in Derby.

I really enjoyed working in orthodontics full-time and found it very rewarding. From initially seeing the children coming in with concerns and worries about treatment, to explaining all the treatment options, and then seeing the children's progress every six weeks or so. At the end of the treatment the results were amazing and to see the children so confident with their new beautiful smiles was brilliant.

Hospital dental nursing

I have only recently started working at the hospital. Working in the head and neck department we see a large variety of patients that are referred to us either by their GP or by their dentist. We have a large orthodontic department run by two consultants and we also have five maxillofacial surgeons. We hold a minor op surgery where we do a variety

of procedures such as extraction biopsies and other oral surgery procedures. The maxillofacial department also treats patients who have head and neck cancer and cares for them from their initial referral through investigation, treatment and long term follow-up care.

Sometimes trauma cases who have been seen at the hospital as in-patients continue to be seen at the clinic run by the consultants.

We also have a cleft clinic and we see these particular patients over many years: at birth, aged five, seven, ten, 15 and at 20-years-old. These patients might have a cleft palate and hair lip and sometimes need reconstructive/plastic surgery, orthodontic treatment and restorative surgery. The appointments are held with all of the contributing consultants present and the patients are also monitored by speech therapists.

At the hospital we also have what we call a MAD clinic. This stands for Maxillary Advancement Device and patients are referred via the sleep clinic or by their GP or GDP. The MAD appliance worn by the patient is designed to posture the mandible forward; in so doing it moves the base of the tongue forward and opens the airway. The appliance is easy to use and is effective in improving breathing, reducing snoring and treating mild sleep apnoea.

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I really enjoy the variety of my day-to-day work in the hospital. There are so many different clinics running and we also see and treat patients with cancer. These patients are seen on a combined clinic with the consultant maxillofacial surgeons, the oncology consultants, a specialist head and neck nurse and dietitians all working to ensure the patient’s treatment and ongoing care is the best it can possibly be.

There is definitely a strong sense of teamwork in my department. It’s always daunting coming into any workplace where

people have been working together for a long time. Although so many of the girls have worked in the department for many years and job opportunities don’t come up very often, I feel very much part of a team.

I prefer working in a hospital than in general dental practice. After working in both environments I prefer the wide variety of patients we see in the hospital and the more complex treatments we carry out.

After working within the hospital environment I think I am more aware of the prevalence of oral cancer, of the importance of regular check-ups and lowering risk factors such as smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol.

Keeping up-to-date

It was quite difficult to meet the GDC’s new CPD requirements when I worked in general practice. However, *Vital* verifiable CPD is so good and a lot of the girls within the department now subscribe to it. We are also required to have a certain amount of mandatory training which the NHS trust supplies for us. As well as this we have had a variety of lectures arranged within the department. One of the most recent lectures was held by the maxillofacial dental technicians from the lab which is based in the department. The lecture was on prosthetics in maxillofacial surgery. There is usually one lecture a month.

I think it is essential for dental nurses to have good communication skills. Some patients are nervous and anxious when going to the dentist and sometimes the hospital environment can be daunting too. As a dental nurse it’s important for us to keep the patient well-informed of what’s going on.

I would tell other school leavers thinking of becoming a dental nurse to go for it! Dental nursing can be so rewarding and such a varied profession. There is also the opportunity for further training and to go on to do dental hygiene/therapy or, as a couple of the dental nurses within my department have done, to qualify as orthodontic therapists.

Interview by Kate Maynard.