

Reaching out to the community

Dental Nurse of the Year **Heidi Wyatt** on her role as a Community Dental Nurse at Smile Together, a member of the Association of Dental Groups

I was just 17 years old when I joined a youth training scheme (YTS) in Cornwall and I started working in a dental practice. I've always had a passion for helping people, so when I stumbled across an article about the role of a dental nurse, I couldn't believe my luck. Now, 27 years on, I still love the role as much as I did when I started – possibly more! I especially get work satisfaction out of helping people overcome their dental fears and thrive on being able to help patients improve their oral health. I've worked in various positions since qualifying as a dental nurse, treating approximately 89,000 patients so far. In my current role with Smile Together, a staff-owned community interest company in Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly's leading primary care dental provider, I work as an access and community dental nurse. On a normal day (if such a thing exists!), I divide my time across four clinics, working in collaboration with four dentists, four dental nurses, two decontamination technicians and administrative support.

Typically, I arrive at work at about 8.20am, as I like to get nice and organised before my first patient arrives. Forty-five minutes later (and at least one cup of coffee down) the doors of the practice open and my day officially begins. Thereon in, my day is consistently busy until 5.15pm, seeing as many as 16 patients per day. These appointments cover a wide range of patients, many of whom are often in severe pain or have additional needs such as learning difficulties or non-verbal communication. As such, my scope of practice includes sedations and general anaesthetic assessments as well as the provision of routine treatments and oral health advice to patients of all ages.

Tooth extractions

Having worked at the centre of the community, I have taken a particular interest in children's oral health. Tooth extractions continue to be the number one cause of hospital-based admissions among children aged between five and nine years old, with the referral figure for Cornwall

currently thought to stand at approximately 1,000. In an effort to educate the public on brushing techniques and the dangers of sugar consumption, I have taken an active role in Smile Together's Brighter Smiles campaign, helping to deliver oral health education, tooth brushing clubs, diet advice and fluoride varnish application to some of the most deprived schools in the area. I have also become a keen advocate for expectant mothers so, where possible, I educate pregnant patients on the importance of their oral health and provide tips on how best to care for their family's teeth. When I'm not performing my clinical duties, you'll find me at one of Smile Together's staff council meetings representing my fellow colleagues. I am one of two dental nurses elected to the council so it is my responsibility to voice any queries, concerns or ideas on how to improve our service. I enjoy being part of a large team where we regularly attend staff meetings and clinical away days where we are able to socialise with fellow colleagues.

Privileged

There are many benefits of working as a dental nurse within Smile Together and I am very privileged that I have been given the opportunity to undertake extra qualifications to broaden my professional role. In addition to receiving training to become an oral health educator, I am also qualified to do full mouth plaque and debris scoring, as well as apply fluoride under the prescription of a dentist. As such, I feel that working within



a group provides fantastic opportunities for progression. What's more, the company pays for my indemnity cover with the Dental Defence Union, which is fantastic! From community and special care to access and orthodontics, the variety of dentistry that we offer allows my colleagues and I to gain new skills and build upon our knowledge every day – for that alone you can't fault working within a group.

For more information about the ADG, visit www.dentalgroups.co.uk