

"I provide my patients with a listening ear and have been there for them in many situations such as depression, anxiety and grief."

Annette started off as a trainee dental nurse and worked her way up to becoming a qualified dental therapist and hygienist. She hopes to have her own practice one day. Read her story.

Annette Matthews

Dental therapist and hygienist

Employer or university

Midlands Dental Therapy



I love the patient contact and the difference I can make to their lives by improving their oral health and systemic wellbeing.

How I got into the role

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I started as a trainee dental nurse in 2006. I loved the industry and was excited to learn how I could extend my skills and help patients even more. A year later, I qualified as a dental nurse. Then I started working with some fabulous hygienists and really liked how they interacted with patients, providing them with vital treatment options.

I found out about a dental therapist's role after looking at courses and speaking to peers. This really excited me as I would have the opportunity to treat patients on an even wider scope, increasing my skill set.

I had no A-levels so I completed a year-long Access to university course, alongside my dental nursing job. I was placed on a 'reserve list' at my local University of Sheffield and managed to get a place last minute but before this offer I was set to head to Glasgow for my placement to start there. My advice would be to have a back-up plan and don't rely on getting into just one school.

What I do

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My days vary, depending which practices I am working in. I have busy days which include back-to-back restorative dentistry and there are days when I focus on prevention and dental hygiene. My favourite is the cosmetic approach to dentistry with smile 'makeovers' and composite bonding, which is a recent enhancement to my career.

The best bits and challenges

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I love the patient contact and the difference I can make to their lives by improving their oral health and systemic wellbeing. I provide my patients with a listening ear and have been there for them in many situations such as depression, anxiety and grief.

In my short career, I have seen a handful of patients with suspected oral cancers and basal cell carcinomas which I have referred. This has been a pivotal point in my career as I realise the importance of a profession like mine.

An early diagnosis would provide a better outcome for my patients. This highlights the importance of direct access which means that a patient may see me without visiting a dentist first, thus giving them more options for treatments and appointment availability.

I am an avid member and executive committee member of the British Society of Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists (BSDHT). This has been a vital element of my career – keeping up to date with the profession and empowering new and current members into utilising their full skill set.

We ordinarily work with a general dentist who is responsible for prescribing items like local anaesthesia and fluoride, things we routinely need and use on a daily basis. We can however work within our scope via direct access.

The biggest challenge I have to date is prescribing rights for certain medications and products to complete my job with the best outcome for my patients. Improving patients' options is something that my profession is working toward.

Life outside work

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I am an avid runner and find running great for managing stress levels and mindfulness. I love the gym too and this is usually an escape, some 'me time' after work. I have a young family and love spending time with them at the weekends.

Career plans and top tips for others

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I would love to have my own practice one day, providing the best care I can for patients. I plan to mentor individuals over the next few years to encourage more skill mix and integration of therapists into the day-to-day work of dental teams.

I have a keen interest in digital marketing and endeavour to educate both my patients and my peers about the benefits a dental therapist can bring to every practice!

For those considering this role, you need to have resilience, and be approachable and adaptable.