

"Every patient is unique so there is no 'one size fits all'. Every appliance is made bespoke for that patient."

Andrea began her career in the dental team as a trainee dental technician and is now an orthodontic & maxillofacial laboratory manager. Read her story.

Andrea Johnson

Orthodontic & maxillofacial laboratory manager

Employer or university

Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Andrea Johnson - Orthodontic & maxillofacial laboratory manager

How I got into the role

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I needed a career change, but it had to be one where I could train whilst working. I looked in the local papers and saw an advertisement for a trainee dental technician in a small laboratory just minutes from my home. I was fascinated by what I saw in that lab and knew this was the new challenge I had been looking for.

I studied a BTEC national diploma in dental technology and passed with merit. Then I went on to get a corresponding foundation degree and finally topped up with a BSc (Hons), which I passed with first class honours.

Being a mature student, I thought it would be so much more difficult for me, but it wasn't. It's surprising how easily you slip into it when you have a real interest and drive for what you are studying.

What I do

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There's no typical day in a dental laboratory. Every patient is unique so there is no 'one size fits all'. Every appliance is made bespoke for that patient.

You can try and plan your day but you have to be flexible. You never know what work will come through the door: a new appliance, a replacement one as the patient's dog has eaten the previous one (!) or a necessary emergency appliance because a patient has had an accident and requires something to help hold everything in place while they heal.

The best bits and challenges

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Working within dental technology has led me to do things that I never dreamed I would be doing. As well as working full time in a hospital as a highly specialised technician and laboratory manager, I teach dental technology and chair our professional association. I also founded and chair a dental charity which is very rewarding. I also work with the General Dental Council on an advisory group to help shape the future of our professions regulation framework.

This has all given me a skillset that has allowed me to shape and improve our profession. I feel very lucky to have had so many opportunities, many of which have taken me all over the world. My days are never boring.

Life outside work

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The nature of my job means that I must sit for prolonged periods of time carrying out fine detailed work, so it is important to keep active when I can. I attend the gym at least 5 days per week and participate in a variety of fitness events, including running marathons,

ultra-events both at home and abroad and walking my dogs.

Part of my work with my charity is facilitating dental restorative treatment for domestic abuse victims, struggling veterans and the homeless. The skills I gained from dental technology have given me the ability to change people's lives both in my paid work and outside of it. I am able to restore their dental function, their self-esteem and confidence. My life may be full on and hectic but it is very rewarding.

Career plans and top tips for others

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There are various areas within dental technology so you need to find an area to concentrate on that fits your skill set best. When training you will start out learning all the disciplines. This is very important as you need to understand about all the materials and techniques, the strengths and weaknesses of all the appliance types so that when you choose your preferred area, you know how your work will impact others.

I love my job and going forward, I would like to perhaps extend my skills by training in clinical dental technology but who knows? I am a natural manager and organiser too, so there are many options open to me. I will have to see where life takes me, but, no matter what, I know it will be interesting.

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