

# "Working in Special Care Dentistry means I can work with the whole person, liaising closely with other healthcare professionals to provide the best care."

Since Lydia was 14, she has loved dentistry for its mix of art, science, and decision-making. She was inspired by her own dentist and her friend's mum, who specialised in Special Care Dentistry. Seeing women leading in these roles encouraged her to pursue a career in dentistry.

## Lydia Barker-Chapman

### Specialty Registrar in Special Care Dentistry



#### How I got into the role

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From age 14 I knew I wanted to be a dentist – the mix of art, science, decision making and problem solving was fascinating, so I set about getting a variety of work experience including with Special Care Dentists.

My own dentist was a lovely woman who I had known for many years, and my best friend's mother was the local Specialist in Special Care Dentistry. It was important to see women in leadership roles, and these along with many others inspired and supported me to follow my current career path.

At A-level I did not meet the entry requirements for dentistry, so instead did a Biomedical Sciences degree before applying for a four-year postgraduate dentistry degree.

I was really pleased to have three offers to choose from. One of the most appealing things about the postgraduate degree was that I could get financial support through student loans.

I did my Foundation year before doing my first year of Dental Core Training (DCT) in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS) at the Royal Lancaster Infirmary. After that, I was a Community Dental Officer (CDO) in Hereford, then in DCT2 I did a year in OMFS in the Cumberland Infirmary, Carlisle, before becoming a CDO in West Cumbria. Finally, I applied for my current role as Specialist Registrar in Special Care Dentistry.

## **What I do**

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I move across South Tyneside Hospital and Sunderland Royal Hospital, the Royal Victoria Infirmary and the Freeman Royal Hospital in Newcastle, and University Hospital of North Durham and Darlington Memorial Hospitals, working in outreach clinics, hospital environments and domiciliary settings to treat patients with additional needs. I work with a variety of patients with learning disabilities, autism, dentally anxious, physical disabilities or who have complex medical needs.

I chose to train in the North East as it has a fantastic range of facilities, a welcoming training environment and enthusiastic, helpful team members. The North East is linked with Cumbria for training, which has meant I already know some people on that side of the UK. This has eased my working transition. The Find Your Place website ([www.nhsfindyourplace.co.uk](http://www.nhsfindyourplace.co.uk) <sup>[1]</sup>) has great information on the training available in these areas.

## **The best bits and challenges**

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I enjoyed dental school as I got a fantastic grasp of all aspects of dentistry. You get the chance to be creative and scientific. Working in Special Care Dentistry means I can work holistically with the whole person, liaising closely with other healthcare professionals to provide the best care.

It's interesting meeting a wide range of people and make connections. Dentistry is extremely practical and I get to treat patients every day, rather than just diagnosing and having to wait to treat them.

Rural and coastal areas like the North East and Cumbria can struggle to recruit and retain dentists, meaning that some patients can't access certain services. This is a real challenge for our teams, and it would be hugely beneficial to have more enthusiastic people to join us working in this area.

We are passionate about our communities and are real advocates for our patients. The people here are fantastic and it's a real privilege to be able to work with and for them.

## **Life outside work**

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Outside work, I am a fell runner who loves the Lake District. Living close to the mountains means I can take advantage of all they have to offer. I enjoy exploring new areas, especially when I get a good view at the top! In the summer this normally means a swim in a lake or tarn at the end of a run which is a lovely treat. Work life balance is vital – I really do switch off in the evenings and weekends. The benefit of a career in Special Care Dentistry means no on-call or out of hours working, which was important to me.

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

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If you're considering a career in dentistry, think about using your differences to your advantage. For example, I gained work experience in a wide range of services, including a dental technician's lab and the Community Dental Service. This meant I had a broader understanding of the profession and could discuss this. Communication is key, so think of examples when good communication has secured positive outcomes.

Make sure people know how passionate you are about the profession and take up opportunities that arise while - however don't stretch or force yourself to do something you do not want to do.

You should also think long and hard about whether you actually want to study dentistry. Get some experience to get an idea of whether it meets your expectations before applying. It is a commitment, so you need to make sure it is right for you.

I aim to complete my specialty training in the next few years and hope, in the future, to lead a Community Dental Service. I would like to be a kind, approachable leader to all staff and patients, who helps to inspire the younger generation into this profession.

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**Source URL:**<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/dental-team/roles-dental-team/dentist/real-life-story-lydia-barker-chapman>

**Links**

[1] <http://www.nhsfindyourplace.co.uk>