

‘THE ONLY WAY is *up*’



Mhari Coxon RDH* writes about her journey as a DCP and says ‘join the revolution!’

** Mhari has worked in dentistry since 1993 and currently works full-time as a dental hygienist in a private practice in Central London. She writes regularly for a variety of publications and lectures regionally and nationally. In 2006 she received the Dental Hygienist of the Year award and is also closely involved with the BSDHT. As Clinical Director for CPDforDCP Ltd Mhari can be reached at mhari.coxon@cpdfordcp.co.uk.*

A happy accident

I started my career in dentistry as a happy accident. I saw an advert at the back of my local paper in my home town of Troon, Scotland and thought ‘I suppose I could suck saliva out of people’s mouths for a few months before starting my business degree’. Don’t lynch me; I was on the other side of the tube then! A few weeks into practice and I was hooked.

I started training in the evenings, travelling by train after work to a college in Glasgow to study the DSA qualification. Gaining the knowledge of how things should be done was a double-edged sword for my practice. I have never been backward about coming forward and got busy implementing changes to improve our cross infection and patient care.

Following my heart

A bout of following my heart not my head found me moving across the border to Lingfield in Surrey and working in a large anaesthetic clinic in East Grinstead, West Sussex. I worked alongside anaesthetists, oral surgeons, general dentists, hygienists, sedation trained dental nurses and general nurses. The amount of knowledge in that building was fantastic. I learned how to support general nurses in resuscitation and would often talk to parents about prevention to help stop the children returning for more treatment. My thick accent and their understandable anxiety levels were barriers to achieving behaviour change but it gave me an interest in prevention.

Although I loved my job there, I craved a more involved role. At that time there was really only the sedation and radiation course for dental nurses. Oral health education courses were available but access while working was difficult (yes, no internet at that time, I am that old!).

So, I applied to King’s College London for their one year Diploma in Dental Hygiene course (again yes that old!) and was lucky enough to be accepted first time. The rest as they say is history (enough with the old comments please!).

Babies ... and biofilm

When I first qualified I was fortunate enough to be given a staff hygienist role in the periodontal department at King’s.

This allowed me experience of working on advanced cases with top consultants and also gave me the opportunity to take on some clinical tutor roles. I left to have my first child in 1998 and did not return until 2003 after having my third! 2005, sadly, saw me leaving my tutor post at the – by then



– Guy’s, King’s and St Thomas’s school of hygiene and therapy for a full time practice place. Having three children produced financial needs that my tutor role and local job could not provide.

2006 saw me invited to speak nationally at the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy’s (BSDHT’s) annual meeting in Harrogate and this led to other offers to lecture. I have an unhealthy interest in biofilm and its relation to oral health which people found interesting, and have spent a lot of time researching instrumentation techniques to best disrupt it. I also speak on motivational interviewing. By the end of 2007, I had been a speaker at many regional and national BSDHT and other bodies’ events and had met so many delegates that I again wanted to take things further and have even more input into the industry.

History in the making

In 2008, Scope of Practice came into fruition, the culmination of the hard work of so many societies, associations, the GDC and dental care professional (DCP) representatives. ‘A professional’s scope of practice is likely to change over the course of their career, as some registrants develop their skills and others will narrow their scope but become more specialised in a particular area. All [GDC] registrants have an overriding professional obligation and ethical commitment to work within their own competence,’ said Duncan Rudkin, GDC Chief Executive.

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Pictures from the 2008 CPDforDCP roadshow

As DCPs we all wanted more but knew that Rome wasn’t built in a day. We have to prove ourselves to be responsible, accountable professionals, and if we do, the only way is up.

DCP CPD

With this in mind and with the fantastic support of my good friend Jo Jones as educational director (Jo was previously the Deputy Principal of the GKT hygiene and therapy department), www.cpdfordcp.co.uk was born. We embarked upon providing small tailored courses for DCPs across the UK, with practical elements to develop skills that can be transferred to daily practice. We started in 2008 with a course for dental hygienists and therapists, and have since expanded to include all team members. Jo and I have access to many fantastic educators from our days of working in the hospital and in practice and try to vary our educators according to the course we are running and the skill group we require.

It’s all in the mix

For us CPDforDCP Ltd is about making professional development accessible – by working throughout the UK and online – and attainable to DCPs, while exceeding the criteria set by the GDC. Showing professionalism while developing our careers as DCPs will encourage our new GDC Council to further extend our duties as auxiliary staff members. Our courses mix theory with practical elements to help increase the amount that can be learned in one session. Our friendly, approachable teaching methods seem to get great feedback.

Accessible CPD

This year will see us dip a toe into online and distance learning, to better support our busy working delegates. Online lectures and mentor support should help professionals to achieve positive advancement in a way that suits their personal needs.

A bright future

CPDforDCP Ltd would love to see modular learning, where for example a dental nurse can follow a path that suits his/her environment and develop skills to become the support for an oral surgeon, suturing at the end of surgery, or ultimately even becoming the surgeon themselves if that is what they desire. I truly believe there has never been a better time to choose dentistry as a career. It is important to keep up-to-date with all the core subjects and something like *Vital* is a great way to develop interest and access affordable CPD online at a time convenient to you (thank you Mhari! – ed).

Social networking

If you had told me this time last year that I would be using Facebook I would have laughed out loud. (Remember, there were no mobiles when I was young, and no home computers!) Now, as I write this article, our Facebook page has over 1,900 fans and we have met some great people through it. Using Facebook dental practices can find us and we can make our courses personal for each group as we work with small numbers to ensure quality training and attention to detail. Individuals can ask for advice and have received lots of good supportive comments from our fans as well as from us. Career development for dental nurses features heavily in our 2010 courses as this is what people say they want. Facebook has brought many dental professionals together in the UK and across the world with positive lively debate and fun social elements too. Many other companies and corporations are using social networking to great success, accessing professionals and the public in an instant format and promoting their product or service at the same time. So come on, join the social revolution and be part of its growth; it’s easier than you think!

To become a fan of Mhari’s company and join the online discussion, log in to Facebook and search on ‘CPDforDCP Ltd’.

