

From bottom to top – and everything in between

He has worked in almost every role within the dental business, including as a dental nurse. Here, **Hassan Mushaid** explains why he will never stop learning

I have an interesting story that I think will be useful for many dental nurses. I am a qualified and registered dental nurse, having qualified in 2010 after completing my one-year NVQ Dental Nursing course via Dental Cadets Manchester. Within five years of qualifying, I had worked in almost every role possible – from dental nurse, head dental nurse, treatment coordinator, practice manager, business development manager for a mini corporate to eventually starting my own consultancy/ marketing company in 2014-2015. I want to share my story to demonstrate what is possible and also what other avenues are also open to dental nurses. If I go more into my background, you can see that I had a criminal record, was in and out of jobs and got kicked out of college when I was 17. Here's my story...

Why did you want to become a dental nurse?

I've always had an interest in biology and science from a young age, but never pursued my interests into further education at college. Instead, I decided to take the work route and left college in my first year. My friend's uncle was a dentist who gave me a tour of his practice and introduced me to his team and I immediately decided I wanted to pursue a career in dentistry, working with patients and alongside fellow professionals (which would definitely make my mum proud, too!). At the age of 19 and unemployed, I sent 34 letters to numerous dental practices requesting an opportunity to become a trainee dental nurse. I received no responses. I gave up and carried on working full time for some years with various companies – mainly retail and customer service roles until one day, at the age of 22, sat at my desk working as a full-time business advisor for PC World, I saw an ad by the NHS Dental Cadets, offering apprenticeships for dental nurses. I made the decision to leave my full-time job that I only started one month beforehand and become an apprentice earning the apprentice wage for one year until I was qualified. This was a big drop in pay for me – in fact, a £15k



drop. I realised this was potentially my only opportunity to get into dentistry and to actually gain a professional qualification. I took the plunge and haven't looked back since.

How has your perception of dental nurses changed?

My initial perception of dental nurses was that they were all female. When I began my Dental Cadet course, I was one of only four male dental nurses on the whole course that consisted of around 30 people. A rare entity – a male dental nurse was both a positive and a negative for me. My other perception was that dental nursing was a quite relaxed role – and, boy, I was wrong! Dental nursing is a fast-paced, 'on your feet' role that requires a lot of energy. I must have lost weight with the running about. I enjoyed it and I loved the environment; it was a massive change to my usual desk job. It's akin to working in a restaurant kitchen with various orders (or treatments trays, in our case) that need to be prepared.

How has GDC registration made a difference to your role?

Dental Cadets made it extremely clear

the importance of becoming a registered professional. We were to act as professionals at all times in and out of work or risk losing our registration. They also explained the reasons behind the GDC existing and the whole purpose of the council being there to make sure the patients are never at risk. It was a bit scary but, at the same time, a no brainer as they were acting as a council to protect the dental team and our patients. I loved the fact they pushed professionals to learn and develop, meaning one can never go stale in the role. Again, a massive advantage compared to a normal desk job.

For how long did you practise?

I practised as a dental nurse from 2009 until 2012 and gained extensive cosmetic dentistry experience working alongside Dr Monik Vasant, who was also a great mentor to me. His practice was designed to cater for everyone, but especially private clients, which gave me vast knowledge and experience in dealing, communicating and attracting private clients. Dr Vasant gave me the freedom to learn and delve into marketing to help the practice, for which I am truly grateful. He also invested in

Tracy Stuart's training programme for the whole team, which really opened my eyes to the patient journey and marketing in general.

Why did you set up your consultancy? What did you draw on to qualify to be a successful business consultant?

After working with Fresh Dental, I left the practice to further develop myself and applied for the position of a practice manager at Bury Dental Centre, working alongside Dr Daniel Cheung and his team. Dr Cheung gave me an opportunity to show my self worth by managing his fully private practice, which I really enjoyed. He pushed me to learn more about business, marketing and I was allowed to implement my ideas and strategies within his practice and got to see the results first hand. I later worked for a mini-corporate as a business development manager with the clear objective of looking to increase its brand and profitability. This was a different type of challenge that involved changing the culture and mindsets of more than a handful of team members while using PR to give the corporate a 'human face'. The budgets were bigger and creativity was encouraged. The results were more than what I expected with a huge increase in local brand awareness and dental plan success. It was at this stage where I wanted to test more different business models, teams, locations and budgets so took the leap in December 2014 to open my own dental business consultancy and marketing agency – The Creative Composite Agency.

How best to persuade people you are the right person for the right job?

The best way I found was to look at marketing myself and to create a different mindset to the rest of the market. I began studying the dental business and this became evident at my interviews – business owners would find it comforting to have someone on their team that was aware of business rather than just dental nursing. Being confident with my tone, posture and eye contact played a huge role too as well as asking questions that made the owner think I was the answer e.g. Who manages your social media accounts? No one is the usual answer, hence where I fall into the picture

What insight can you offer dental businesses having been a dental nurse?

What most dental business owners don't do well is showing how grateful they are to their dental nurses. This is probably the biggest reason why dental nurses switch jobs – they are never made to feel like they play a part in the overall success of the dental practice.

One-to-one personal 'thank you's' and regular appraisals can go a long way.

Do you believe dental nurses are well placed to run and manage a practice?

I would say so. They get to see patients in their most vulnerable state and also get to work with various dentists so can clearly see what type of communication style works best for which types of patients. They also are the backbone of dental practices and can come up with suggestions from a totally different point of view. They totally understand the client base.

Do you see yourself as an inspiration to other dental nurses?

I do get the occasional shocked faces when I tell

dentists and nurses that I am also a qualified dental nurse. They just cannot grasp the idea of a dental nurse, especially a male nurse and one who now runs his own dental consultancy business. I think I am a great example of what you can achieve as a dental nurse if you have the mindset that there is no ceiling to your dental career and aspirations.

What do you wish you'd known before you started in dentistry?

I wish I had been given more information about what you can achieve as a dental nurse. I had to figure this out. If there were someone to guide me and tell me how my personality could help in certain aspects of a dental business, I would have planned well ahead for my future.

3 things I have learnt along the way...

1. Always look to improve yourself and become an asset in the practice where you are working. This helps keep you on your toes and prevents you from getting mentally stale.
2. Empathise with your patients. You can truly never be a great dental nurse unless you understand empathy. Every patient comes from a different background so you should appreciate their experiences and listen to their concerns.
3. Training is crucial to becoming a dental nurse. Without the dentists, hygienists and nurses who trained me, I wouldn't have been a good dental nurse. I followed their footsteps and gave back to other fellow trainee dental nurses – creating more awesome nurses.

3 top tips for good communication with patients...

1. Always show empathy. You just never know what type of day the patient has had, if there are personal problems at home, work problems and to top it all off, possibly toothache! Just show you care and they will really appreciate it.
2. Help the patient to future pace. This is where you can help describe to a patient subtly what their life and future might be if they went for the treatment they actually desired then putting it off for another year.
3. Remain unbiased regardless of what services you provide, what area your practice is based in or how many exempt patients you have in your diary. You must provide clear treatment plans, stating the pros and cons for all options. Never judge a book by its cover!

3 top tips for managing staff

1. Reward creativity and willingness to go the extra mile. Failure of reward allows your competitor the opportunity to reward them.
2. Listen. Every team member is different and you do spend more time with your work team than you probably do with your children or family. Listen to them no matter the topic and lend a shoulder to lean on.
3. DISC analysis. I always get my teams and client to complete DISC Analysis so I can find out what type of personality they possess. Allows better communication and you can assign and delegate the correct jobs to the right team members.