

# Giving dentistry a positive spin

The transition from dental nurse to dental hygienist was a fast one for **Anna Middleton**, and she hasn't looked back...

Anna Middleton is only 30 but her dental career has rocketed since qualifying as a dental nurse in 2010.

Within less than five years, she had embarked on a dental hygienist course and has since scooped an award for her efforts (as well as shortlisted for two others), become a Key Opinion Leader for Philips and an Oral Health Panel Expert at patient education website, [comparethetreatment.com](http://comparethetreatment.com).

Currently working at Chelsea Dental Clinic in Chelsea and White & Co Dental in Wandsworth in London, she is keen to raise the profile of women in dentistry and educate patients about key oral health issues. She embraces social media as a tool to do so with vigour, using the profile name of @Londonhygienist.

So, looking back on her career to date, how did it all begin? Anna says: 'I had a strong desire to study again after college and I'd never been to university. Medicine and biology always interested me but I was never sure which route to go down. I had been in and out of the dentist chair my whole life and one day a friend suggested I become a dental nurse. I started as a floating dental nurse and spent the majority of my time with the hygienist who became my inspiration. A year later I was training as one.'

For Anna, the career step was a fast one. She explains: 'I'd only been a dental nurse for a year and, immediately after qualifying, applied to study hygiene. I never dreamt I would be accepted first time round as I know how competitive it is. Some people on my course had no dental nursing background so, for those of us who had been dental nurses, having that underpinning

knowledge really came in handy.'

When it comes to extended duties, Anna is adamant it is important to develop skills in order to build on a dental nursing career.

'I asked my manager if I could start doing more at the practice, especially when quiet and I had no one to nurse with. She was more than happy to help me. I went on to become a first aider, a fire marshal, implant dental nurse and was even shown how to cash up and trusted to lock up when the practice manager was absent. After I qualified as a dental nurse, I went on to do my radiography training and had planned to do my oral health education train course. The more strings you can add to your bow, the better.'

Mentoring has been instrumental in developing her career – and not all have a background in dentistry.

She explains: 'From day one, I had my dentist, hygienist and manager who supported and encouraged me – and now I have several others. Some of them are dentists, but I also have a few who have no dental knowledge but help motivate me personally and in business. I can go to my mentors whenever I have questions or need help, but I also find they help focus me and nudge me in the right direction.'

The encouragement has helped Anna expand her remit, too, and made her aware that not everyone is as enthusiastic about her role as she is.

'I meet a lot of patients who have had bad experiences at the dentist, so I love trying to flip it and give them a positive experience, filled with lots of motivation and encouragement. Seeing my patients smile after their appointment – and knowing they are happy – is a great feeling and, when they return, I feel good knowing I've eliminated their fears.'

The extra expectations that have come with the roles of a Philips Key Opinion Leader and Oral Health Panel Expert at [comparethetreatment.com](http://comparethetreatment.com) have cemented this thirst for education and Anna believes they have helped to fortify the trust



patients have in her. She says: 'My work with Philips has allowed me to see innovative technologies that are cutting through to consumers and allowed me to voice my professional opinion on new products. The value of them communicating their science and innovations to me as a healthcare practitioner has helped me to then share this information with my patients.'

'Equally, my work with [comparethetreatment.com](http://comparethetreatment.com) focuses on helping consumers who may have questions – or are being exposed to false information about oral care. Through written articles, I am able to manage that misinformation and set the record straight. It's nice to see other roles within dentistry being utilised by such companies, rather than solely dentists. They use us all together, which really is empowering for all involved.'

So, what are her tips for any dental nurses considering a change in their career pathway?

For Anna, managing time while studying was key. 'There is so much to learn and take in – you need to be very disciplined. You live, eat and breathe dentistry for the whole time you are studying, and your work



**Anna Middleton** can be found on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) as @Londonhygienist.

is expected to always be the highest quality.

'There are constant tests and assignments to be submitted and you don't take days off for fear of falling behind. It's a full-time job and, on top of that, I worked part-time at weekends and during the holidays as a dental nurse to help fund my studies. I moved from Devon to London and there were times when I was home sick, but I kept reminding myself that it was just two years and it would all be worth it at the end.'

'Failure wasn't an option and my friends were always at the end of the phone if I needed them and I made lifelong friends while on the course, too.'

She recommends: 'Make sure you know exactly what being a dental hygienist entails and what to expect. Speak to other hygienists and try to work with a few so you really can get a good insight into their working day and they can help mentor you. Also, different universities have different entry criteria so knowing what they are looking for will help you when you go to apply. If you don't have the desired criteria, see if you can start working towards achieving those to ensure your application is considered, or demonstrate what other skills or qualifications you have that will make you stand out. Don't be put off! I didn't have the A-levels required but I highlighted that in my personal statement and then listed all the other things I had done while being a dental nurse in my pursuit of eventually becoming a hygienist.'

Now working as an independent dental hygienist, would she recommend setting up as a business?

Anna says: 'It depends what you want in the long run and your circumstances. I spent nearly two years working for other people and I wasn't happy. I needed something to drive me and push me, I wanted to do something different. It's hard work and a lot of trial and error but if you have a vision then go for it!

'Being self-employed is very liberating and I couldn't imagine going back to a 'nine-to-five' job now.'

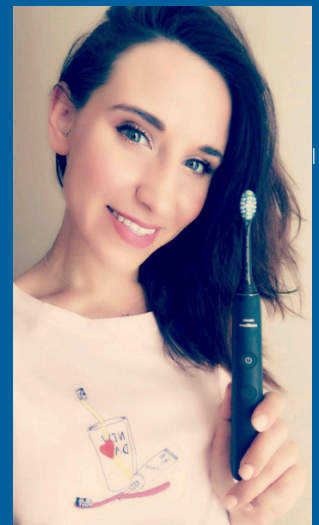
However, Anna admits she is still learning. Having once been told 'if it was that easy everyone would be doing it', she is keen to get the work/life balance right. She advises: 'Always read contracts fully before you sign anything. Don't be afraid to set your terms out and stick to them. Never be afraid to ask for help or advice from others, you'll be surprised how many people there are behind the scenes that help me daily.'

### 5 tips for newbies

- 1** Be a sponge. Take everything in and remember there's no such thing as a silly question. Ask your dentist to involve you when looking at radiographs or taking a shade, for example
- 2** Be patient. There is a lot to learn and often it can be hard if you're training on the job, as it can be a high-pressured environment at times. Still struggling with mesial and distal and can't get that alginate mix right? Don't worry, practice makes perfect. Use any quiet time to work on those
- 3** Be organised. Look over your day list in the morning and ensure you have everything you need for the day ahead and be ready. Remember happy dentist, happy life
- 4** Stand out. Be punctual for work, dress appropriately, always smile, be reassuring, be friendly and enthusiastic. These things will see you become a genuine asset very quickly in your practice
- 5** Make friends at work and online. There are plenty of dental nurses utilising social media to whom you can reach out. Join online forums for help and support.

### Shine on Anna's Sonic success

I think my passion, confidence and enthusiasm shine through. Confidence breeds confidence and all the practices I work in believe in my skills and think what I am doing is first rate. My patients tell me that what I tell them is fascinating. They can all see how much I love my work and that I take pride in what I'm doing. As well as my face-to-face encounters, I direct patients to my website to read my blogs, or they can interact with me on social media at any time. The practices directly benefit too as I bring business to the practice and if my patients need any dental treatment then there is a whole team there ready to look after them. My efforts have led to two award nominations; Most Invaluable Team Member and Dental Hygienist of the Year. I partnered with Philips at the beginning of 2017 to work on a variety of events and was honoured to be included in the 'ShineOn' campaign and speak on a panel at the Dentistry Show. I've also had several articles published in some of our leading industry magazines and I'm currently working on other articles as well as some for the mainstream press. I've helped on some charity projects and will be travelling to Uganda this month with Dentaaid. Philips Oral Healthcare is shining a light on the work of dental hygienists and therapists and their commitment to improving patients' oral care through its new 'Shine On' initiative. The campaign includes a digital hub – [www.philips.co.uk/shineon](http://www.philips.co.uk/shineon) – featuring videos, industry news, educational resources and exclusive giveaways. Dental hygienists and therapists are also invited to participate by sharing their own Shine On moments on social media, tagging their posts with #shineon and #philipssonicare.



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And, finally, what is the one thing she couldn't do without in clinic? She says: 'Fed up of always having a tense and sore neck, I invested in some loupes, and now I can't work without them. My posture has improved and surprisingly my bank

balance has too, thanks to fewer visits to my osteopath! The enhanced vision has given me a newfound control over my instruments – one that has been noted by patients in their compliments of how gentle I am.'