

Day in the life of a: RAF Dental Nurse, Air Specialist 1(T) Collins explains...

Air Specialist 1(T) Kayleigh Collins is a qualified RAF dental nurse and has been in the military since 2017, starting her career at RAF Halton for basic training and then on to Defence Medical Services Whittington for phase 2 training, which teaches the basic skills of a dental nurse. To become a dental nurse in the RAF, training can take up to 18 months, and you must pass multiple exams and register as a dental care professional once qualified.

What does a day in the life of a RAF dental nurse look like? The truth is, it's hard to pinpoint because every day in dental nursing varies and that's the beauty of the role, but all dental nurses would agree that it is fast paced, educational, ever-changing and a team effort.

Fast paced - As a dental nurse we are always thinking ahead and multi-tasking to ensure that surgeries are well stocked, instruments have been sterilised and are ready to use for when the patient arrives. The day can vary from seeing patients for periodic dental inspection's (PDI's) fillings, extractions, fitting dental prosthetics and root canal treatment. PDI's are vital to ensure that all service personnel are fit for active duty and that they are not a risk of developing serious dental conditions when deploying, especially outside of the UK.

Educational - Every day is a learning day in dentistry, even when you think you have seen it all. As registered professionals, dental nurses are required to complete Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as part of their General Dental Council (GDC) registration; this simply ensures that Dental Nurses are continually learning new advancements in dentistry, developing personally and are up to date with current dental guidelines. Our CPD ensures we are giving the best possible care to our patients. Dental nurses can also train for post-qualifications, such as fluoride application, taking dental radiographs and teaching oral health education.

Ever-changing - Defence Primary Healthcare (DPHC) ensure that we are providing safe and effective dentistry to Service Personnel. DPHC set our Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's); these are regularly reviewed to ensure that no matter which dental centre you are seen at, you receive a consistent level of care.

Teamwork - The team at RAF Brize Norton consists of a mixture of military personnel and civilians. Dentists and dental nurses work closely together and develop good communication skills with each other, so much so that they seem to know exactly what each other need without saying a single word! Training teaches dental nurses the materials, equipment, and instruments and all their uses (there are over 100 different instruments that are used in general dentistry).

So, what does a typical day look like for a dental nurse?

Well, we all start at 8am as a team, we get changed into our scrubs and set our surgeries up ensuring that all equipment is working correctly and is signed off. The hardest part of the job are technical problems, whether it be equipment malfunction or computer issues. These issues cause delays to patients and disrupt smooth clinical delivery.

Our appointment book lets us know which patients are coming in, how long their appointment is, and the treatment needed.

Once the dentist is ready, we call our first patient through. We check through the patient's medical history and dental charting to ensure that all records are up to date. Dental records always need to be accurate in the event of formal identification of a body. Ante mortem records we store, show all rotations of the teeth, spacing and fillings in a patient's mouth. X-rays are taken to have a better view of the teeth and bone levels. Dentists and dental nurses always leave the room when an x-ray is being taken to limit the amount of radiation to which we are exposed.

Once the appointment is finished, the surgery is cleaned, and the instruments are processed for sterilisation. The surgery is then set up for the next patient.

At the end of a working day, we all work as an effective team and rally around helping each other shut down surgeries, ready for the next day.

Dental nursing is an extremely rewarding career; some dental nurses go to university to train as dental hygienists or become dental practice managers.

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