

IT ALL STARTED WITH *dental nursing*

Could Jo Russell have more strings to her bow than any other DCP featured in *Vital* so far? **Kate Maynard** thinks it's entirely possible.

I love my life and the opportunities that dentistry has given me,' says Jo Russell from Portsmouth, who juggles dental nursing with lecturing, training and running her own company as a consultant. 'The options available to you are varied but you need to be motivated and have the aptitude and the passion to do the job.'

Jo, 39, originally from the Wirral, had planned to join the RAF police when she left

school. While she waited to turn 18 so she could join, the careers office informed her of a vacancy in the local dental practice. She instantly took to dental nursing and decided to study for the national certificate, passing first time the week after her eighteenth birthday.

'We did reception and nursing jointly at the practice,' says Jo. 'I loved the patient contact and also the responsibility.' Jo found a great teacher in the dentist, Paul Crockford, who encouraged her to qualify so that she could understand the procedures in more depth.



In the Navy

Jo enjoyed dentistry so much that she decided the RAF police were not for her. Quite by chance, the first stop on her train to Liverpool from the Wirral was St James's Street, the location of the army and navy careers office.

'I went to see what the Navy had to offer and they were really helpful,' explains Jo – and in 1990 she joined up.

She does not regret her decision, and describes her time in the Navy as 'fantastic'. Continuing to work as a dental nurse, she

worked with specialists in conservative dentistry, periodontology and oral surgery. Every few years she was rotated to different bases and clinics, and even became involved with training new dental nurses with dentist Commander Richard Hayward, who is now the Dean of the Faculty of General Dental Practice (UK).

Climbing the ranks

'In the Navy there are so many opportunities,' says Jo. 'There are training courses for

everything.' She qualified as a Radiation Protection Supervisor (RPS), gained both general health and safety and manual handling knowledge, passed a two-week residential leadership course and completed three practice management courses too.

Jo then became senior dental nurse in a huge clinic before moving to her own clinic as practice manager.

'I was lucky enough to have a couple of outstanding senior rates [practice managers] to learn from when I was dental nursing,' says Jo. 'I would watch and learn how they approached challenges and tricky situations and store it for future reference.'

Confidence building

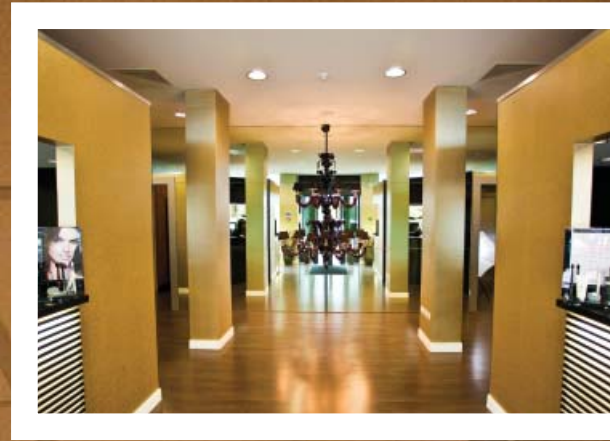
There was no stopping Jo's career progression. From 1998-2000 she was area practice manager for 16 practices, working for Integrated Dental Holdings (IDH). She often worked 50 to 60 hours a week, spending evenings and weekends completing paperwork.

'A few of the practices were quite high maintenance, requiring me to spend a significant amount of time with them. Some of the other practices trundled along quite nicely but as a result didn't see me quite as often.' However, Jo always looks on the positive side, and says that being an area manager meant that she gained a huge amount of knowledge and experience. 'In fact, the knowledge I gained from IDH gave me the confidence to start my own business and showed me that there was a definite need for consultancy services and training.'

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Turning to teaching

In the early noughties Jo and her husband Chris's two little boys came along, Ben and Carl – but there was no slowing Jo down. In 2006, her colleague Leanne Covey suggested she start teaching. Jo admits, 'in all honesty teaching was the last thing on my mind but there was government funding for the Certificate in Education so I arranged childcare for my youngest son and spent two years qualifying.' She really enjoyed the course and the people she met and from there decided to teach one-day courses for dental practice managers and receptionists. She teaches on useful day-to-day subjects such as human resources, health and safety and clinical governance.







‘They have been very popular over the past couple of years,’ says Jo, ‘especially Dental Terminology and Treatment Explanations for non-clinical DCPs such as receptionists.’

No rest for the wicked

As Jo had built up a good rapport with local practice managers, she did some market research and realised that there was interest in the BTEC Professional Diploma in Dental Practice Management. She contacted Glenys Bridges under whom she had studied for her own Diploma via the BDPMA in 1997. Glenys runs the Dental Resource Company (DRC) so Jo met up with her and it was decided that Jo would deliver the BTEC Diploma through DRC in Southampton.

‘I started out marking work sent in by students (which I still do on a Monday),’ says Jo. ‘Then I began teaching the Diploma four months later in January 2008 to my first 13 students. I have to say I am immensely proud of all of my students; the work they are producing is a credit to all of them and there are some lucky practices out there to have them as managers.’

Jo admits that time is tight and a year ago she had to teach on the day that her son Carl was at nursery and coordinate with her husband’s shift work in the motor industry. Jo’s latest Diploma course began in January and both children being at school has made juggling a little easier.

Ask the oracle

Alongside all her teaching and working as a dental nurse for an agency, Jo started her own consultancy, Oracle Practice Business Solutions. Oracle offers help to practice principals

to put policies and procedures and clinical governance in place, and also helps them through their PCT inspections. They provide in-house training and also cover the core CPD topics including disinfection and decontamination, radiation and radiological protection and complaints handling.

In December 2008 Jo gave a lecture on human resources to fourth year dental students at Bristol Dental School.

‘I feel this really is a way forward for qualifying dentists as they have little or no knowledge when it comes to hiring, retaining and developing staff,’ says Jo. ‘Clinical governance also advises that appraisals and professional development plans are written for employees; many practitioners are unaware of this and do not carry them out and record them.’



The future

So are there any boxes Jo has not yet ticked? Of course! In December she completed her NEBOSH Certificate in Health and Safety. She explains: ‘In 2009 through my company Oracle I want to be able to offer a scheme for health and safety whereby the practice signs up on an annual basis and I will provide all the health and safety training and paperwork for them, keeping them updated when legislation or procedures change.’

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So how does Jo remain so driven and enthusiastic about her multiple roles in the dental industry? She considers herself lucky to have a supportive husband in Chris, who keeps the children engaged when she has an assignment to complete and puts up with her tapping away on the laptop while he’s watching TV.

Starting out as a dental nurse opened up a whole new perspective on life to Jo. ‘I enjoy going to work, and if I didn’t then only I can change that.’

For more information on Jo’s company, visit www.oracle-pbs.co.uk or telephone 07876 701560.

www.dental-resource.com
www.bdpma.org.uk

The images of Jo throughout this article were taken at Swiss Smiles www.swiss-smiles.co.uk.