Case Study: Dentist - Jennifer

What do you do?

Like most dentists, I repair and maintain patients' teeth and gums. I work to keep them functional and looking good. I specialise in improving the appearance (shape, alignment and colour) of people's teeth.

What is your background?

Before becoming a dentist, I did a little bit of everything: data entry, childcare, administration. None of it was challenging enough for me. When I got a job as a dental nurse, I realised what working as a dentist entailed - it was more than just replacing and fixing teeth.

I love combining art and science with people and business. As a dentist, I create smiles. That is why I decided to become a dentist.

Also, because I am my own boss, I have control over my career. After finishing dentistry school, I gained experience in someone else's practice; then I was able to open my own practice.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

It is crucial for dentists to be able to get on with people. Much of your success as a dentist depends on the relationships you build with people, including employees, colleagues and, especially, patients.

It's also important to be patient and hard-working, with good attention to detail. Working in a patient's mouth requires precision work, and can be time-consuming and exhausting.

Finally, a dentist should think quickly. It's important to be able to identify potential complications and solutions immediately when you are dealing with someone's health.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

Because of the manual dexterity required to be a dentist, it might be possible to move into the world of visual arts.

Also, dentists are experienced when it comes to business matters from having run their own practices. This means that they could move into another area and open up their own small business. Finally, dentists might make good teachers.

What changes will there be in the future?

I believe that, in the future, the demand for dentists will increase. People's teeth will always need to be cleaned and repaired.

The future will continue to bring changes in the way dentists do their job, since technology is always advancing. We are constantly finding new ways to make patients more comfortable and the results of our work more enduring.

However, technology will never replace the need for dentists themselves; this will remain an essentially people-oriented profession in many ways.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

The most challenging part of being a dentist is the daily stress of the work. By this, I mean having to face each new unpredictable case with fresh eyes and come up with an individual solution for every one.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?
Yes, there are many opportunities for young people in dentistry. I advise anyone who's interested in the field to concentrate on sciences in their early education, and study hard during their degree.

What do you like about your job?

One of the things I like about my job is that I get to meet new people every day. Learning about the people is just as important, if not more so, than learning about their teeth.

Another thing is that every day is different. There's a root canal to be done. There are fillings to be done. There are emergencies. Every day is different and unpredictable.

The other side is the artistic side. I have the chance to help people feel more confident when they smile - that's an amazing gift. A good dental restoration is just as satisfying to me as relieving pain.

What do you dislike about your job?

This is very difficult work. It's mentally and physically draining. We run at a rapid pace. My hands have to do everything my brain has been trained to do. It's hard work.

What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

I would advise anybody interested in a career in dentistry to study hard, make sure you enjoy science and like working with people.

This is definitely a people profession. Every day, you'll relate to your staff, your colleagues and your patients. If you can combine art, science and people skills, this is the career for you.

A day in the life

8:30 am - 9:00 am
- preparing for daily schedule
- reviewing patient charts
- conferring with dental nurse on certain procedures
- taking care of office business.

9:00 am - 10:00 am
Putting composites on two front teeth. Giving two patients a check-up.

10:00 am - 11:30 am
Replacing a crown and seeing two patients for routine check-ups.

11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Seeing an emergency patient with a chipped tooth and fixing it. Doing a routine check-up on two patients.

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm
- seeing another emergency patient with severe pain
- diagnosing and treating the problem
- doing two more routine check-ups.

1:30 pm - 2:00 pm
Lunch break

2:00 pm - 3:00 pm
Seeing another patient for a crown and seeing two patients for routine check-ups.

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm
• filling a cavity
• doing the last two routine check-ups
• seeing an emergency patient who has pain in a back tooth.

4:00 pm - 4:30 pm

Attending to last-minute business and finishing writing up charts for the day's appointments. Making any phone calls that need to be returned.

4:30 pm - 5:30 pm

Reading dental journals.