

Laying the foundations of your career with the Dental Therapy Foundation Training Scheme

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Charlotte is a Dental Therapist in Liverpool and co-owner at Aspire Aesthetics Academy



Graduating from university, certificate in hand, it is expected that you will walk in to practice on your first day with a confident glow, ready for anything! The reality is that there will be no tutor wandering around ready to jump in, and the appointment lengths are drastically reduced.

Following my graduation from the University of Liverpool in 2018, I joined the North West Dental Therapy Foundation Training scheme hoping to bridge the gap between my university experience and the busy NHS world that I knew was awaiting. The Dental House, a Liverpool-based ten-surgery practice offering all range of specialities, was keen to take on a foundation trainee therapist to work alongside the general dentists, foundation dentists and specialists. Dr Stuart Garton, my educational supervisor, and the practice principal, took me under his tutelage for the year-long scheme.

The Scheme

The scheme was developed to mirror other regions in the UK that had already piloted foundation training in response to the suggestion that dental therapists solely practiced as hygienists following graduation, often leading them to deskill in the therapy aspect of their work. In the North West deanery, the Dental Therapy Foundation Training scheme is a non-compulsory postgraduate training which offers 2 or 3 days in an NHS practice combined with monthly study days. There are 2 yearly intakes in April and September for newly-qualified dental therapists. The pay is set at £100 per day with entitlement to annual leave.

The Educational Supervisor

While the majority of treatments during the training are conducted independently, an educational supervisor is available in practice for support. It is this safety net which helped me build confidence initially, whether I requested the support or not. Twice a month, tutorial sessions with my supervisor enabled me to discuss or practice procedures that I had identified as challenging. A training portfolio allowed me to reflect on these tutorials and set targets for future practice.

Study Days

Who doesn't like a day out of work once a month? Study days are either theoretical or practical, and contribute towards CPD requirements. Halfway through the year, trainees present a case study to peers which is a great opportunity to compare and discuss practice with other trainees. The best perk if you're lucky, is the free lunch, courtesy of the Oral B and Colgate reps!

Benefits

I was compelled to cast a light on the foundation training scheme in writing this article as it is often wrongly considered as the option therapists choose if they are unable to find work or just about passed their hygiene/therapy degree. In fact, the training provides a smooth transition between university placements and general practice, with guaranteed nursing support. Personally, it provided me with the time to discover what I enjoyed the most in dentistry and offered a great work-life balance. It has been a great addition to my CV and contributed to me being taken on by Rose Lane Dental Practice working alongside my “perio heroes” Helen Minnery and Ian Dunn!

The Supervisor Perspective

Stuart Garton

Practice Owner and Educational Supervisor – The Dental House,
Liverpool

As the owner of an ambitious and busy multi-chair practice, we can see the huge benefit of integrating dental therapy into our setup. We are in an area of relatively high need and often large volumes of stabilisation work can be necessary to ensure our patients are brought back to “health”.



We see the dental therapist as the cornerstone of preventive care and the opportunity to work with enthusiastic newly-qualified clinicians is one that we relish. Aligning the correct practice ethos with dental therapy has allowed us to grow our practice in a positive way, and we have tried to provide a good environment for therapists to flourish.

Because of the financial support offered by the dental therapy foundation training scheme, we were able to “ease” Charlotte into her role, with initially extended appointments and buffer time between appointments. The reduced pressure to make the numbers work allowed Charlotte to gradually increase her speed and we were able to help her gain more experience in a safe and controlled way. She completed her year as a much more confident and well-rounded clinician and hopefully we have given her the platform to go on and do some amazing things!

For anyone considering going into the dental therapy foundation training scheme, we would highly recommend it, and will definitely be considering utilising this scheme further in the future.