

Give Dental Hygienists More Responsibility, Says Worcester Student



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A dental hygienist, studying at the University of Worcester, is leading calls for a radical shake-up of the UK's dental services.

Nichola Tong, who practices in Bath, says there needs to be more collaboration between dental hygienists/therapists and dentists, in order to streamline services and make them more efficient.

In an article, published in *Dental Health*, a peer reviewed journal for dental professionals, Ms Tong says: "Following the dental market study by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in 2003...the OFT recognised that a dental hygienist/therapist can provide many services traditionally provided by the dentist, therefore resulting in more efficient use of the dentists' time, and dentistry being delivered more innovatively to the service user."

She adds: "According to the centre for Workforce Intelligence, 35% of dental visits and 43% of dentists' clinical time is currently devoted to duties that could be done by a Dental Care Professional (DCP)... Delegating dental activity to DCPs would mean that dentists' time would be accessible to more patients and that the dentist is able to conduct higher value, more complex treatments."

The article arose from an assignment Ms Tong wrote as part of her [BSc\(Hons\) Health Sciences](#) degree at the University of Worcester, which she is due to complete this summer.

"At the time of writing my assignment I didn't realise that my topic was set to be a big deal in dentistry," she said. But her research revealed that preventative dentistry in the UK is currently undergoing the greatest level of transformation since the introduction of NHS dentistry in 1948 with the introduction of a new contract reform which encourages more collaboration. She said she was delighted to have her article accepted and published in the leading peer reviewed journal within her profession.

"It is a huge achievement for me and is the result of being on the course at Worcester, which has been a huge source of inspiration and is changing my professional life," she said.

"As well as my article I have done some presentations to dentists on the strength of my research."

Ms Tong has already led her practice through structured and planned change to implement greater collaboration and now the dental hygienists/therapists carry out the oral screenings.

"When I trained as a dental hygienist, more than 20 years ago, I qualified with a diploma, and I wanted to top up to a full Honours degree," she adds. "I chose Worcester as I wanted a broader health degree and something that would give me scope to develop my career across a wider knowledge base."

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