

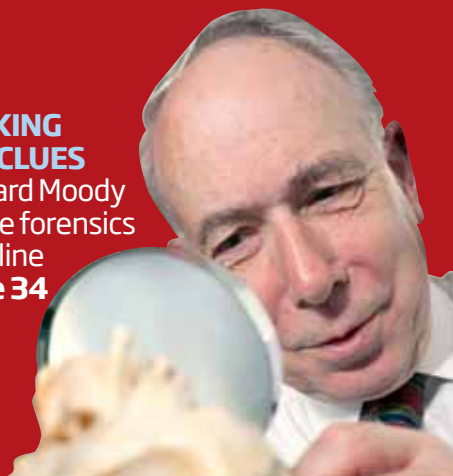
The magazine for dental professionals working in Scotland

June/July 2010

# Scottish Dental magazine

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## Education

Bruce Oxley finds the dental school at Coatbridge College set to become the envy of other educational centres across the UK thanks to the drive of its head, Jennifer Lowe

**J**ennifer Lowe has used her personal experiences of dental training to inspire a new generation. That's according to her former tutor at Glasgow Dental School.

Bill Collins, who was the director for the school of dental hygiene at the time, revealed that it took Jennifer time to find her feet, but that when she did, there was no stopping her.

And it is an insight into the mind of her students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, that has propelled her to become the head of the dental school at Coatbridge College.

He said: "I think her experiences have helped her enormously. I think that's why she is so good. She appreciates how difficult it can be to learn and she knows how to help students who are experiencing difficulties. She understands the mindset of her pupils and uses that to get the best out of them."

Jennifer, who grew up in Bathgate, West Lothian, qualified as a dental nurse in 1984, and as a dental hygienist in 1985. She has worked in general practices in Bathgate, Hamilton and Coatbridge during her career, but it was obvious from early on that her passion was in teaching.

"I found that I enjoyed the education side more than the clinical side as, for me, it was more rewarding and challenging," she said.



# Head of the class



**"Our passion is education and we want to make sure we get it right. I'd like to see this as a centre of excellence for education in Scotland"**

*Jennifer Lowe*

She started teaching dental hygienists at the Glasgow Dental School in 1988 until 1990 and then again between 1996 and 2000. During this time she gained a masters in public health from Glasgow University and also started lecturing for Coatbridge College's evening class in dental nursing in 1990.

Jennifer only started working as a full-time lecturer at Coatbridge College in 2005 and in that short time she has risen through the posts of senior lecturer, curriculum leader and onto her current position as head of school. When she first started at the college, the dental nursing department consisted of two staff and one teaching room. They offered the national certificate in dental nursing as well as SVQ levels two and three.

The department has since grown to cater for every level of dental nurse students from a Higher entry level through Intermediate levels one and two, SVQ level 3 and onto their newest qualification, an HND in dental nursing. Jennifer and her team's enthusiasm and ambition has also seen them introduce qualifications in dental technology, a diploma in orthodontic therapy, as well as PDAs (Professional Development Awards) in dental administration and dental practice management.

They have also introduced courses on introduction to dental implants, tooth whitening, scope of practice for the dental team, CPD for the dental team and completing a GP17.

When it was announced that the college was to receive a

facelift and that more than half of the staff would be decanted during the renovation to a new facility at Duart House on the nearby Strathclyde Business Park in Bellshill, Jennifer spotted a unique opportunity.

Thanks to her persistence, drive and determination Jennifer managed to persuade the college that when the rest of the staff move back to the old building, the dental department should remain in the new facility. A significant investment was then pledged to transform vacant office space at Duart House into a state-of-the-art teaching and training facility that will be the envy, not just of other Scottish education establishments, but of centres around the UK.

The centrepiece of the development is the clinical skills room that features 12 phantom head stations, with the tutor's station fitted with a high-tech endoscope linked to a flat-screen television to allow for



**STEPHANIE ROBERTSON**

"I had been working as a dental professional for more than 20 years and decided I wanted to gain some formal qualifications.

"Studying at the School of Dental Studies has been a great experience and the support I received was next to none. They recognise that everyone has different needs. I loved my course and the staff were amazing."

greater illustration and explanation of techniques.

The dental school also includes a dedicated reception area, which will in the future, it is hoped, welcome patients, two office and administration rooms, two teaching rooms complete with dental chairs, a common room for the students and an LDU. The college has also taken on a number of other rooms on the second floor of the building, which it is hoped, will

be developed into surgeries and meeting rooms for courses.

Speaking after last month's industry open evening and ahead of the official opening on 7 June - where Public Health Minister Shona Robison will cut the ribbon - Jennifer described her emotions. She said: "It's been a fabulous journey. I am hugely excited with what we have here at the moment and the potential for where this could actually take us as an

education establishment.

"Our passion, first and foremost, is education and we want to make sure we are getting it right for our learners. I'd like to see this as a centre of excellence for education in Scotland."

Jennifer speaks with real pride about students who have made successes of themselves after learning at the college. She explained: "Coatbridge, like many towns in Scotland, has its fair share of social deprivation and we see quite a few academically challenged pupils coming through. But to see someone who has literally come from nothing, achieve a qualification that will transform their life is a very special achievement and gives me a real buzz.

"There are a lot of learners that come from deprived backgrounds and they've maybe been conditioned at school to believe that they're going to go and work in a factory, or that

**Continued »**



Jennifer Lowe, centre, believes hands-on training is important

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# Education

Continued >

they're a no hoper. And for a lot of them it is about building up confidence.

"You do see some of them coming in and they have their heads down and they don't speak to you, they don't communicate. But I've got students now standing up in front of a

**"The joy is teaching, but it is also important that you engage with students... every student is different, every class is different"**

Jennifer Lowe

class and presenting, they go away and research subjects they come back and deliver it to the class. So that's a measure of the personal confidence we are able to instil here."

One of the key elements that Jennifer believes makes

Coatbridge College's approach stand out is the application of hands-on learning and allowing different members of the dental team working together. For dental nurses, for example, she explained how they believe it is important they get the opportunity to work in the mouth and experience holding handpieces, even if that is not what they will be doing on a day-to-day basis in general practice. That experience will not only allow them to be better nurses, but it will also allow them to better assist their dentist and hygienist colleagues.

Coatbridge College's new dental facility not only allows them to improve and increase their portfolio of DCP courses, it offers opportunities for post-graduate education and CPD courses for the whole of the dental team.

John Doyle, principal and chief executive of the college, said: "What we have here is a first-class facility that is state of



## Margaret O'Hare

"I was working as a dental nurse before I came to college, but now that you need qualifications I came back to study. The facilities at the School of Dental Studies has given me a better, more realistic, learning experience. I now have more knowledge and confidence. I even got a full-time job at the dental practice I did my placement in."

the art and what we now need to do is listen to the profession and the industry to see how we can work in partnership with them to improve dental health-care across Scotland.

"In terms of the college, what we want to do is use this to build not only a Scottish base, but also a UK and international centre of excellence for dental studies. And I'm every confident with the staff we have here, that we'll be able to achieve that."

And the principal reserved special praise for Jennifer: "She has been the keystone to it all, she's led and directed the development of the school, supported obviously by the senior management team and the board.

"She is a real talent and someone who has taken her team and built with them over the past four years, to produce the excellent facility that we have today." ■

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## Workforce development award

All 1 Smile have won a prestigious award in partnership with Coatbridge College at the Business to College Awards 2010, organised by Scotland's Colleges.

George Campbell (owner of All 1 Smile), had approached Coatbridge College to propose a partnership to develop two new courses. These are the

Certificate in Orthodontic Nursing and the Diploma in Orthodontic Therapy with the qualifications taking around two years to develop.

George said: "Winning the

award is a great reflection of the work done with the college.

As a partner we had a training need and Coatbridge College more than fulfilled that need, with Jennifer Lowe (head of school, dental studies) leading the project.

"We now have a partner who can deliver training to very specific requirements, which ultimately is helping our staff progress their careers. The overall impact to our business is better qualified staff, increased productivity and better service to our patients."