



Pam Gill: 'Collecting my orthodontic therapy diploma was a day I will never forget!'

By **Kate Quinlan**

Introduction

As *BDJ Team* celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, to help mark the occasion we have caught up with some important people within dentistry to reflect on the past decade and look forward to the next.

This month we meet Pamela Gill, Chair of the Orthodontic National Group (ONG). Pam qualified as an orthodontic therapist in 2012 and has been Chair of the ONG for a year. She is employed by Manchester Foundation Trust NHS services at Manchester University Dental Hospital and has worked there for 20 years. Pam also helps train the trainee orthodontic therapists on the Manchester programme.

The Orthodontic National Group

The ONG, an organisation for orthodontic therapists and nurses, celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. It was originally established by a group of dental nurses working in the orthodontic speciality who saw the need for a representative body. They identified that an authoritative voice was needed to navigate the changes that lay ahead for dental care professionals (DCPs) working in orthodontics. One of those changes was the creation of the title of 'orthodontic therapist',

with which the ONG were closely involved.

The ONG is affiliated with the British Orthodontic Society and is delivering a tremendous line-up of speakers at this October's British Orthodontic Conference in Birmingham for all orthodontic therapists and dental nurses [taking place 16–18 October].

Interview

What originally led you to a career in dentistry?

Pam: I think having a dental trauma aged nine-years-old at school where I fractured my 21. This led me to endure having an RCT and was followed by orthodontic appliances, and this was where my interest in becoming a dental nurse developed.

Were any of your family involved with dentistry?

None of my family members were involved in dentistry as a career; my father was a joiner and my mum was a housewife.

I loved to visit the dentist from a young age as this involved a trip into Manchester city centre, in the heart of city. Often we would visit the dentist and then head to King Street for some obligatory shopping.



Pam Gill, Chair of the ONG

How did you find having orthodontic treatment as a child?

My orthodontic treatment journey began at age 11 years and involved an upper removable appliance (URA) to decrease my overbite, followed by premolar extractions and fixed appliances. I clearly remember the smell of the clinic, and I loved to watch how the nurses would pass the instruments and coloured modules – which was always the highlight of the visit.

Can you summarise your early career in dentistry?

I became a trainee dental nurse at 16-years-old. I often worked alongside the hygienist and as a treat on a Friday I would get to go into the surgery with the dentist and his nurse. This was always a nice change. As my confidence grew assisting, I worked solely with the dentists doing a variety of treatments. I gained my NEBDN certificate in 1998 and I won the Son of John Platt Prize which was awarded to me by Oldham College. As my passion developed for dentistry, I wanted to know more about orthodontics and this led me to change my job role into an orthodontic nurse at Heaton Mersey Orthodontic Practice.

Whilst working in the orthodontic practice, I qualified in Dental Radiography though Salford University in May 2002 and in 2005 I gained my post qualification in Orthodontic Nursing. I was then keen on achieving my Oral Health Education certificate and did so in 2009 with a merit.

I knew at this point that Leeds was planning on opening a course for a brand new role as orthodontic therapist and this became my dream goal.

course. In 2011 I was selected to train as a trainee OT in Manchester and collected my diploma in 2012 at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSEd) – a day I will never forget!

How did you find the orthodontic therapy course?

It was very intense, especially as it was only a nine-month programme. There were moments of elation when fitting separators and days of disappointment when the day just didn't go to plan maybe because I was running late or had to deal with difficult parents. Overall, I made some great friendships that have stood the test of time.

Did you continue working in dentistry while you studied?

Working and studying to become an OT wasn't an easy task because I was juggling my new work role, being a wife, being a mother and also studying theory and learning new clinical skills. There were nights when I would wake up surrounded by textbooks where I had been revising and fallen asleep because I was mentally and physically drained.



The original five founding members of the ONG, left to right Maureen Dickinson, Janet Robins, Alex Jones, Fiona Grist and Jo Stevens



Formal photo of the first ONG Committee members in the Eastman Dental Hospital quadrangle. Left to right: Maureen Dickinson (Scarborough Hospital), Janet Grey (Leeds Dental Institute), Janet Robins (Royal Surrey County Hospital), Alex Jones (Eastman Dental Hospital), Jo Stevens (Kingsdon Hospital), Fiona Grist (Worthing Hospital), Ann Jones (Manchester Dental School) and Denise Douglass (Cumberland Infirmary)

'I often worked alongside the hygienist and as a treat on a Friday I would get to go into the surgery with the dentist and his nurse. This was always a nice change.'

What was your route to becoming an orthodontic therapist?

In July 2004 I began working at Manchester Foundation Trust (MFT) University Dental Hospital as an orthodontic nurse and seeing the complex patient cases, I knew I had found my passion.

I began to do nurse led record taking clinics; this gave me a sense of what it would be like to become a clinician. I studied to gain a Certificate in Healthcare Education with UCLAN and once I had completed it my next goal was to become an orthodontic therapist (OT).

Ann Jones was the educational manager and Mr Michael Read was the course director of the Manchester OT course. Ann was passionate about the career development of DCPs. In her role with ONG she became heavily involved in the development of the curriculum for the new orthodontic therapy

After you qualified as an orthodontic therapist, did you find work straight away?

Since qualifying I have continued my part time employment with the NHS Trust. I currently work four days per week and have Thursdays off. On my day off I tend to catch up with friends and family. I find that working four days a week makes me more productive, and I have time to complete my tasks for the ONG.

Was it satisfying to have more responsibility and patient interaction once you became an OT?

Yes, I do enjoy the responsibility and interaction with my patients and families and this gives me better job satisfaction.

I work closely with several consultant orthodontists, and training consultants in the hospital; no day is ever the same. At every

second appointment the patient will see the supervising orthodontist to continue their care and treatment.

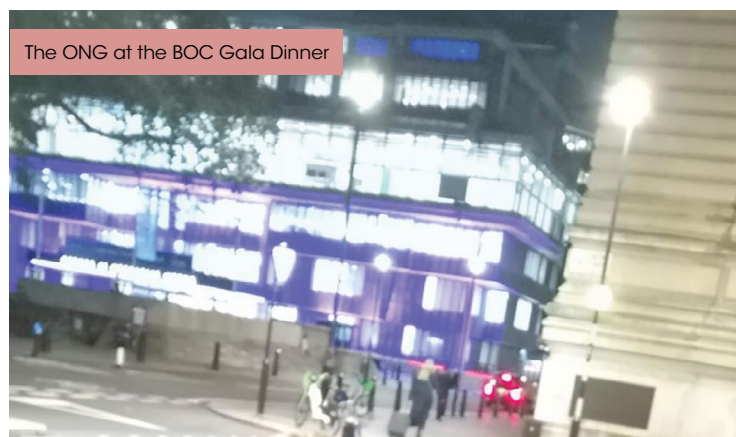
How did you become involved with training other orthodontic therapy trainees?

Since qualifying I have helped to teach OTs in training and DCPs undertaking their post qualifications. I do love the teaching aspect of my role as it enables me to get involved with the career development of the future workforce. Anyone who knows me will say that I am always there to offer advice on how they can enhance their careers/goals.

When did you first get involved with the ONG?

I first became involved with ONG in 2017 as a committee member after winning the distinguished services awards for a DCP in orthodontics. I wanted to be more involved with the group – I was introduced to Sally Dye (Chair) and was given the role of editor for the group.

After being the editor for the last few years I was nominated as Chair for the group and began my three-year term last September with Claire Rooney the group's new President.



The ONG at the BOC Gala Dinner



The ONG Committee

Are there more courses available to train as an orthodontic therapist?

There are several training providers for OTs across the UK. These can be found via the GDC website and you can now undertake a two-year apprenticeship scheme under Warwick University.

<https://www.gdc-uk.org/education-cpd/dental-education/quality-assurance/approved-providers/orthodontic-therapy>
<https://findapprenticeshiptraining.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/courses/608>

Is it very competitive to gain a place on these courses?

Obviously the courses are all competitive to gain a place. Post qualifications are desirable but I would say gain some experience of working with an OT to give you an insight into their daily workload/tasks. Being an OT



ONG meeting

BDJ Team celebrates ten years this year. What changes/developments have orthodontic therapists seen these past ten years?

With now over 1,000 qualified OTs on the GDC register we are about to overtake the number of orthodontists, which is a

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momentous achievement. Many OTs now work in several practices rather than working solely in one job as in previous years. The role of the OT has gone from strength to strength I would say: at first I think there was some reluctance in employing and training an OT, but now they are a very valuable team player in the practice and highly thought of. Unfortunately salaries vary for OTs across the UK and I feel there should be a bigger piece of work on this to make the pay for OTs and other DCPs more in keeping with the cost of living.

isn't for everyone – there is a high level of responsibility and level of dexterity required for the role and it can be a stressful job too.

Maybe attend a course which gives you an insight into doing a bonding procedure before making an application.

Do orthodontic therapists have good career prospects and opportunities?

I would like there to be more enhanced roles for career development for OTs. This is definitely an area for development for the future.

Are the numbers of adults seeking out orthodontics increasing?

There has been an increasing number of adults accessing orthodontic treatment since the pandemic, maybe due to the increased number of online meetings. Adults are more aware of their smiles due to Instagram and other social media posts as well – but for clinicians this can be difficult as we need to always manage the level of patient expectation/overall treatment outcome.

Do you think working conditions are good for orthodontic therapists and nurses?

I feel working conditions for OTs/DCPs could always be improved depending on place of work. This could be a menopausal woman needing a light scrub top or a fan in the surgery; time for a quick toilet or coffee break; or just some breathing space to think. We are all aware that stress levels in dentistry are higher than in most other jobs. As a profession we owe it to ourselves to look after each other. I am aware many dental nurses leave their jobs as they can get better pay as a locum – why can't they be better paid for the job that they do? Why lose good staff because of an extra few pounds an hour? It doesn't make any sense to me! In the extra cost of advertising for a new job, time taken to interview – this could all be saved by better pay and better job satisfaction.

What developments within dentistry do you hope to see evolve looking ahead to the next ten years?

With AI being used the most in orthodontics, I see the job evolving so much in the future with digital diagnostics/treatment planning. It's exciting to see the development of technology in materials too. But we do need to be aware of the micro-plastics being used in orthodontic aligners and materials and their impact on general health.

Have you enjoyed being Chair of the ONG?

Since becoming ONG Chair I held my first ONG study day in March this year in London which was a great CPD event with hands-on scanning training in the afternoon. We have had lots of new members join the group and a new branded website and logo. We aim to keep the membership cost at £35 per year and this enables discounts at study days and conferences with our affiliates, the British Orthodontic Society and the British Association of Dental Nurses.

How is the ONG celebrating 30 years?

We are planning a special 30th anniversary lunch at this year's British Orthodontic Conference in Birmingham taking place 16–18 October and with Wrights Dental Supply Co we are having an Orthodontic Nursing Award. We will be at Stand 45 for anyone who wants to come and say hello!

Are you pleased with what the ONG has achieved for orthodontic therapists?

The ONG has achieved so much over the last 30 years. We hope to continue to represent all DCPs working in orthodontics and uphold our passion for education, work with the GDC to develop and recognise changes in workforce plans for the future and liaise with relevant professional bodies to promote the status of dental nurses and OTs.

Do you have any interesting plans coming up that you'd like to share?

I am looking forward to a well-deserved holiday to Marrakech during the winter to rest and refocus ready for 2025.

Do you think the future is bright for the dental team, despite the crisis within NHS dentistry and other problems affecting dentistry in the UK?

Despite the crisis in NHS dentistry, I hope the government recognises the vital role of OTs and dental hygienists and therapists within the dental team if integrated correctly. DCPs can ease the demand of some pressures in the services that are offered.

It is important that the full team's skill mix is being utilised to its full potential, to alleviate the pressures. I feel that if DCPs had better pay enhancement in the NHS this would prevent them seeking better paid remuneration via locum agencies.

Thank you for contributing to BDJ Team, and congratulations on the ONG's anniversary!

To find out more about the ONG visit <https://orthodontic-ong.org/>

BDJ Team has a collection of articles all about orthodontic therapy: <https://www.nature.com/collections/orthodontictherapy>

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41407-024-2782-0>

BDJ Team is 10!



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