

# James Neilson

Versha Miyanger speaks to James Neilson from Winning Smiles Dental Care in Gillingham, Dorset. James is one of the few doubly qualified clinical dental technicians in the UK and is qualified both to treat patients in the clinic and to fabricate their full or partial dentures in the laboratory



**VM:** What made you decide to become a clinical dental technician?

**JN:** I originally became interested in dentistry as a teenager during my orthodontic treatment and decided that I would like to become a dentist. During my A-Levels it became apparent that I was not going to get the grade required in Chemistry, therefore looking at other careers, I stumbled across dental technology. It coupled my ability and enjoyment of craft design with dentistry. I undertook a degree at Manchester and then started work in a lab in Dorset and found I had a particular affinity to prosthetics. During my time at Casterbridge Dental Studio I managed the denture department. I always enjoyed it when patients were sent to the lab for try-in adjustments. It gave me immense satisfaction seeing my work first hand in the mouth and dealing with patients. I was fortunate enough to be offered the opportunity of training as a CDT and jumped at it. I love dealing with people and in improving their quality of life. It is like having two completely different jobs and I enjoy the technical as much as the clinical.

**VM:** You are one of the few doubly qualified CDTs in the UK. Where and when did you qualify and what other training have you undertaken?

**JN:** I originally qualified as a Dental Technician with an HND from Manchester Metropolitan in 1999. Then a year later, in 2000, I graduated from Manchester Metropolitan University with an honours degree in Dental Technology. In 2004 I was offered the opportunity to enrol on the George Brown course in Toronto, where I subsequently obtained my diploma in 2007. I then enrolled on the K.S.S. Deanery (Kent, Surrey & Sussex) and FGDP (Faculty of General Dental Practice) course headed by Stephen Lambert Humble, which led to me sitting exams at the Royal College of Surgeons of England and subsequent graduation with my diploma in Clinical Dental Technology in 2008.

I have since taken part in an increased scope of practice course, run out of the LonDEC training centre for removal of sutures by

prescription, re-cementation of crowns with temporary cement, provision of anti-snoring devices by prescription and provision of sports mouth guards. Other courses that I have undertaken include Schottlander's natural looking denture course, Ivoclar's BPS course (technical), and training in New York on the Valplast flexible denture system and I am currently looking at adding the Swiss denture concept to my skill base.

**VM:** You have been nominated for the UK CDT of the year a number of times. What do you think is the secret of your success?

**JN:** I believe that it stems from good patient care and provision of quality prosthesis made with good techniques and from high quality materials. Putting the patient first, treating them as an individual and not just another patient. Listening and involving the patient in their treatment, clear explanation of procedures, attention to detail and not rushing things. It is equally as important to be able to hold up your hands when something doesn't go as expected, some of my happiest patients have been those where I have not got it right first time!

**VM:** How can technicians help to promote the team approach with their dentist clients?

**JN:** I believe good communication, reliability, quality of service and utilising each team members strengths are key areas. For example: getting involved with treatment planning and offering surgery, or lab visits to aid with individual shade and aesthetic needs. Open days or CPD events at the lab are also a good way of team building.

**VM:** Do you think the future of dental technology lies within the private sector?

**JN:** I feel saddened that NHS dentistry has arrived where it is now and I can't see it getting much better in the near future. A combination of bulk buying and negotiating for lab services and sending work to foreign shores has had a definite impact on the dental lab. The growing popularity and development of CAD CAM technologies are generally cost prohibitive for the NHS market and I can't see how these treatments could be offered under anything but the private sector. Patient awareness and expectations for complex work are growing higher than ever and it is getting harder to meet these under the constraints of the NHS. I feel that there will always be a place for good basic lab work under the NHS



system and the need for local lab support for dentists. However I feel that it will become harder and harder for solely NHS labs to compete and survive, without undertaking private work as well.

**VM:** How do technician's best stay in the know in terms of the latest developments that affect them?

**JN:** There are now lots of courses and publications available making it easy to stay up to date. I find that regularly reading of industry publications, attending trade shows, study groups and watching web base lectures are a great way of keeping your finger on the pulse with new advances and techniques. The DLA and BACDT folders covering core CPD subjects are also a great idea.

**VM:** Professionally, what are you most proud of?

**JN:** Being shortlisted twice as a finalist for the Dentistry Awards and obtaining a highly commended in 2009. Also being part of the advisory panel which led to validation of the CDT course at The University of Central Lancashire.

**VM:** What has been your biggest challenge?

**JN:** I have had many challenges in my career. Such as juggling training as a CDT around work and home life, my clinical exams in Toronto, learning how to manage challenging patients and more recently making the decision to go alone and set up my own laboratory.

**VM:** What has been your biggest mistake?

**JN:** Clinically in my early days, not being

confident enough to know or say when I felt that I couldn't improve on a patient's situation, or meet their expectations.

Technically, completely bonding six screws into an implant wrap around beam with metal primer and acrylic, the day before it was due to be fitted! This led to a late night for the metal worker to re-make the gold beam and virtually no sleep for me resetting and finishing the beam. The appointment was honoured and it was fitted at 9am the next morning!

**VM:** How do you relax in your spare time?

**JN:** I like to be active, either running, sailing or windsurfing. I also enjoy playing skittles and I am a keen member of Weymouth Operatic Society.

**VM:** Where do you see dental technology going in the next decade or so?

**JN:** I see there being a lot more CAD/CAM products being available and implants becoming more accessible and affordable for patients. Also I envisage the dental technicians and CDT role will evolve with an increased scope of practice and more involvement with the patient.

**VM:** What are your top tips for maintaining a successful dental laboratory?

**JN:** Provide consistent quality products within a relaxed team environment. Communicate well with clients and ensure that work arrives to the surgery on time! Keep up to date with new products, materials, procedures and with the ever changing barrage of legislation and regulation, so as not to be left behind.