

# Fairground attraction

It's hard to imagine many party venues that light up a face in the way Happy Kids Dental can – and this paediatric dental practice is not just creating smiles in the chair. Here, one of its dental nurses **Petra Vassell** shares her experience

Happy Kids Dental is an incredibly innovative paediatric dental clinic, situated in the heart of London's West End. It is more fairground than dentistry, more fun-filled than fillings and discreetly clinical.

Its theme park approach is a game changer – an amalgam of jungle playground meets top-of-the-tree treatments. Think of your most favourite of family days out all rolled into one and you capture the very essence of its smart business concept.

Games consoles, interactive screens, ceiling-mounted TVs and giant puzzles and games are dotted throughout the two-storey practice and an array of giant cartoon animal characters signpost its young patients on a journey through a jungle-themed setting.

The mix of technology and design is based on a sole principle – and the clue is in its name. Its tailored approach aims to trigger happy childhood memories but with a modern twist – the playground vibe is a bid to create early day dental experiences to cherish.

Unsurprisingly, the inspiration for this practice of kids' dreams was born in the USA where American dental colleagues have already tapped into the need to entertain to get children on side.

The concept has been brought to life by the imagination of the brother and sister partnership of Yevhen Hunyak and Roksolana Mykhalus, second-generation dentists who saw a gap in the market for an exclusively paediatric practice that could truly create smiles – in more ways



**Petra Vassell** is a qualified dental nurse working as part of the paediatric team at Happy Kids Dental in central London. She trained at King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.



than one.

Petra Vassell, 29, is one of its dental nurses. A dental nurse of three years, she chose dentistry because, she says, 'although it comes with challenges, there are many rewards and opportunities in the fast changing and expanding profession'.

She adores working at Happy Kids Dental, but adds: 'It takes a certain type of person to manage the challenges you encounter working with children and not many can confidently say they are happy dealing with all it can throw at you!'

'It is often difficult to get parents and carers to understand our holistic approach to the patient as a whole, and why we encourage and include early intervention and prevention as standard in our work ethic, rather than coming in and tending to just that "problem" alone.'

She is proud to be part of the team that also delivers special care dentistry and enjoys 'being the familiar face' and offering the much-needed extra support to the patient and family.

Petra says: 'It makes a big difference and is often key when it comes to treating special care patients.'

Patience is essential as well as the need to be a good listener. But she also says the role requires forward thinking and an ability to

adapt quickly.

She explains: 'Working in a paediatric dental clinic, you need to be compassionate, a team player, good at multi-tasking and able to work well under pressure or in stressful situations without the patient picking up on it.'

The friendly environment is something the practice worked hard to create. All 15 surgeries are fitted with equipment to make treatments as stress-free and minimally invasive as possible. Each has the latest generation of dental technology, including handheld intraoral cameras, the lowest-radiation digital X-ray, The Wand, pain-free computerised anaesthesia, inhalation sedation and a hi-tech dental microscope. Not that you'd know this, because all the paraphernalia of dentistry is discreetly hidden, slotted into the non-obtrusive fascia of its sleek white cabinetry.

As well as specialist paediatric care, there is a dedicated specialist orthodontic suite, a surgery set up for young patients with special needs, hygiene and endodontic care and maxillofacial surgery.

The surgeries offer the option of treatment beds or chairs, depending on age and requirement.

Discretion is evidently a key part of the design so that every space, wall, ceiling, nook and cranny works towards creating a child-



friendly environment.

But there is a serious side to all this fun. Happy Kids Dental also has motivational and interactive dental-themed activities and the team offers not only an impressive range of services within an engaging environment, but also go out on the street to speak with children and parents and into schools to engage and educate as well as entertain.

Petra explains: 'The dedicated set-up allows us to engage with the families who visit us, in a way that puts both the children and their parents or carers at ease, taking away from that stigma and fear of going to the dentist.

'We have the luxury of having multidisciplinary expertise under one roof to

offer families world-class dental care using state-of-the-art technology. We are all about taking the fear and anxiety out of dental visits, making the appointment pleasant and relaxed while still delivering A-star care.'

The memorable patient journey starts the moment youngsters walk through the doors – they can have a selfie taken in reception at the photo booth sitting alongside two toothy hippos, play on iPads or, for those who prefer a little less interaction, there's a quiet space, too. The appointment – yes, there are fixed times but the team are flexible should a patient need more time – concludes at the practice's brushing station, where little ones get the chance to clean the teeth of a menagerie of

jungle animals, and finally it's win-a-prize time at its fairground-esque game.

Petra says: 'When you see the patient journey through to the end especially when it is a positive one that helps to restore faith and trust in dental professionals, that's when you are rewarded.

'If you are a person who is caring and takes pride in making a difference and giving something back but cannot quite commit to a more demanding role in healthcare, such as general nursing, I would definitely recommend this area of work because it is very satisfying and fulfilling!'

She also counts herself lucky that her employer and the team with whom she works all appreciate the dental nurse role and are supportive of her as an individual, as well as encourage of her career progression.

She says: 'Mentoring is key to the development of a dental nursing career because it is an opportunity to develop on a professional and personal level. The benefits of being mentored include gaining valuable advice to develop your knowledge and skills, learning how to communicate more effectively and encourages new ways of thinking. It can also open new doors of opportunity as you build a network of personal and professional contacts and advance in your career to the point where you may in turn become a mentor to someone.

'I have met some amazing people on my journey who have all in some way had an impact on where I am now and what I am working towards in my professional life.'

### 5 things you wished you'd known then that you do now...?

1. How much the world of dentistry has to offer, depending on what you're looking to achieve long term
2. No two clinicians work the same so learn to adapt, take away from the experience and embrace new encounters because you learn something new every day
3. The positive impact the role would have on me as an individual personally as well as professionally
4. How beneficial it would have been to make a five-year plan when I qualified in 2015
5. What a difference you can make to peoples lives – in and out of the workplace.

### 5 tips for a dental nurse starting out

- Never be afraid to ask for help
- Take constructive criticism in your stride
- Do not shy away from new challenges or opportunities
- Reflect on your day/week – this is how you will improve as a dental nurse
- Make friends with your team, as these can often turn into friendships for life.

### Children's dental health

- Three major things government can do:
  - Improve children's oral health education and recourses for school nursing and health visiting to provide preventative advice
  - Raise awareness of the impact of sugar on oral health and consider more research in the link between oral health and general health
  - Consider water fluoridation.

Three major things the dental profession can do:

- Push for the expansion of specialist children's dental services
- Continue to educate parents, carers and children on what they can do to maintain good oral health for example healthy diet and regular brushing
- Work with prevention at the forefront of all policies and procedures to improve oral health for example fluoride varnish application.