

Gregor Douglas

Associate Specialist OMFS, South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust

I graduated BDS in Newcastle in 2001, and completed what was then a 'Vocational Training' year in Merseyside. I subsequently took an OMFS SHO post in Liverpool, after short spells in General Dental Practice either side of six months away travelling overseas. During BDS, Oral Surgery had always been the specialty where I had felt most at home, although I soon found myself outside my comfort zone, and on a steep learning curve, as an OMFS SHO in Liverpool.

After two years on the Merseyside OMFS SHO Rotation (and completion of MFDS), my initial fears and anxiety had evolved by degrees into curiosity and ultimately enjoyment. Despite, and possibly because of having no definitive career plan, I decided to return to Medical School on a graduate entry programme in Liverpool in 2006. I graduated MBChB in 2010 having worked part-time as a locum OS Specialty Doctor/ OMFS SHO throughout.

After completing Foundation Medical Training, and getting married, I found myself at a career crossroads in 2012. My dilemma was whether to commit to OMFS training via the then recently introduced national recruitment process, or take another direction. Ultimately, I decided that my work/ life balance would be better served by a career in Oral Surgery, and made this my goal.

I soon discovered that completion of Oral Surgery training was going to be less than straightforward. The 'grandfathering' window on to the merged Oral Surgery Specialist List had closed. Training posts in Oral Surgery were limited in number, and I was deemed to be 'overqualified' due to my accumulated experience in Oral Surgery as an SAS grade.

In 2012 I was appointed as a Specialty Doctor in Oral Surgery in Wirral, where I had previously worked as an SHO. Fortunately, my department was incredibly supportive of my professional development. With financial assistance from the SAS development fund, I was able to complete an MSc. OMFS in Manchester part-time over two years. Despite my lack of training grade status, I benefited from supervised training and accumulated a surgical logbook and WBAs equivalent to formal OS training.

In 2015, now with a wife and two children, I returned home to the North East. I joined the OMFS department at James Cook University Hospital in Teesside as a Specialty Doctor in OMFS. Once again I found myself on a steep learning curve, this time on the middle-grade OMFS on call rota. Again I was fortunate to land in a supportive unit with opportunities for supervised training. With further assistance from the SAS development fund, I completed the PG Diploma in Conscious Sedation in Dentistry at Newcastle in 2019. Development of an outpatient OS sedation service followed, alongside administration roles as middle-grade rota manager and DCT audit coordinator.

After years of accumulating evidence of equivalence in training, and with the support of valued colleagues, I submitted an application to join the Specialist List in Oral Surgery via mediated entry in 2019. Thankfully, I was successful in my application and was granted admission later that year. This subsequently opened the door to regrading to Associate Specialist in 2020, which although closed at national level, has now been reopened locally by multiple NHS Trusts.

I feel very fortunate to have successfully navigated a route through mediated entry to the Specialist List. Like many of my OS SAS colleagues, I feel that a more robust and transparent process to prove equivalence in OS training is long overdue, and would bring us in to line with other Medical and Dental specialties. I'm hopeful that progress will continue to be made. The imminent reopening of a

senior SAS grade nationally will be an important step in re-establishing career progression within OS in Secondary Care.

By a convoluted pathway I have arrived in a role that gives me enormous job satisfaction. Engaging with the annual appraisal process in secondary care has been incredibly valuable in identifying and achieving my development goals. I would encourage OS SAS grades and trainees to take advantage of supervised training where available to support their career development. My own experiences prove that the route to OS Specialist List entry for SAS grades, although challenging, remains open.