

A DENTIST'S LIFE

I get up at 6-6.30 am on early start days; in other words, too early! The first thing I do is groan, as I'm not a morning person. I live in East Sheen, London, 35 and 25 miles respectively from the two practices where I work: the Gallery Dental Centre in Lower Earley and St Anne's House in Cookham. It's in everyone's best interests that I spend the first 50 minutes of my day alone in the car!

Breakfast is black coffee at the practice. On an average week I work 38 hours full-time divided between the two practices; three days at The Gallery and two at St Anne's House. About 2.5 hours of this is administrative: writing notes, referral letters, etc. I do three early starts – 8 am – and two late finishes – 7.30-8 pm every week.

I undertake most types of dental treatment including implant restoration work and minor oral surgery, but I don't do orthodontics. I have a special interest in acupuncture in dentistry: relaxing anxious patients, dampening the gagging reflex, and treating TMD symptoms. I spend approximately 85% of my clinical time treating private adult patients and 15% NHS child patients.

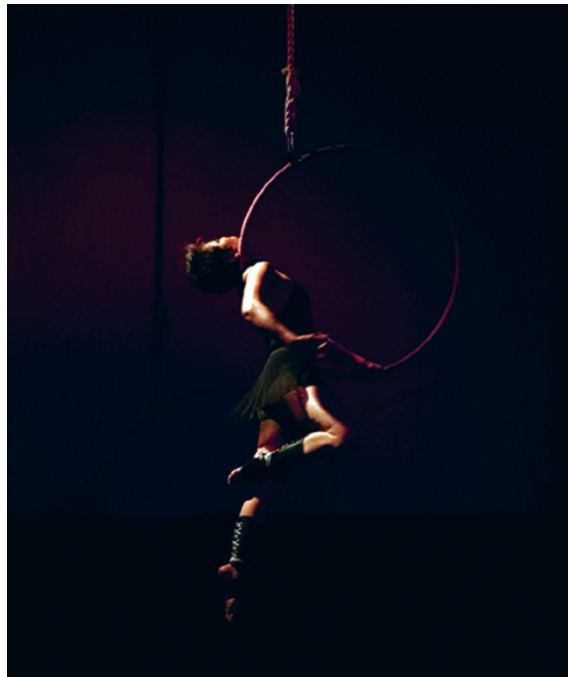
I love the fact that, after 24 years, I'm now looking after the third generation of some families. I've taken care of the children, watched them growing up, kept up with their progress through their school years and they are now adults, bringing in their own kids. It's good to provide continuity of care and actually see the results of preventive advice and practice in the current generation of young adults. I am also fascinated by the interesting lives my older patients have had or indeed are currently living.

I couldn't see myself moving to another practice or opening my own: I love my dentistry but I'm no businesswoman.

I only have a day off a couple of times a year for CPD courses but I exercise every day. I'm either at the gym or doing circus training at Circuspace near Old Street.

THE DENTIST IN THE AERIAL HOOP

Julie Yeung, 50, is a dentist, a gym junkie and an aerial circus artist. Originally from Hong Kong, Julie qualified at Guy's in 1986 and has been an associate in the same mixed private/NHS (children only) practice in Cookham and Lower Earley in Berkshire for the last 24 years. Her long-term partner and 'gym/circus widower' Tasso is a senior programme manager at IBM.



I only started exercising regularly in 1990 after I ruptured my left anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) skiing. Before that I was not a sporty girl, more a stereotypical oriental bookworm. My ACL was treated on the NHS (no surgery) then I had to strengthen the muscles around the knee, so I had to join a gym. I progressed onto doing classes (step was all the rage), qualified as an aerobics instructor in 1995, had the ACL replaced in 1998 then discovered circus in about 2007 after reading a snippet in a magazine about alternative ways of keeping fit.

I was nervous but excited about my first circus 'taster' day. It had us trying everything from juggling to flying trapeze. I then went onto a waiting list to get onto the Circus Arts course and a place came up about 18 months later.

I've been training at Circuspace for the last four years now and do static trapeze and aerial hoop. I have no natural talent whatsoever! It's a lot of hard work but also a heap of fun. I'm pretty specific in what I can do; I'm rubbish at tight-wire, trampette, hula hoop

and juggling, to name but a few.

Recently our amateur circus company Arealism had a one-week residency doing a show we called 'The Lost Circus' at the Vault Festival at the tunnels under Waterloo. Dentisting by day then rushing off to the gym to get into costume and make-up and taking the train to Waterloo (ignoring funny looks from other passengers) and doing two shows an evening was exhilarating but somewhat exhausting!

Anyone can do circus arts if they're determined. A baseline of fitness is useful but you do get a lot stronger in the upper body once you start training in aerial. That's one of the great things about the adult programme. It's a great leveller: it doesn't matter if you're big or little, old or young, you can still be rotten at rope climbing or fantastic at doing cartwheels. It's a great stress buster too – strangely you don't think about work when you're balancing on a trapeze 10 ft up in the air.

I personally don't have to eat more to keep my energy levels up ... I don't eat during the day and have a weird metabolism. I'm a pescatarian but only really eat fish when we go out. During the week I eat lots of veggies, salads, seeds, nuts and pulses, and pretty late at night. I don't eat much in the way of carbs, but have a weakness for popcorn. My diet should not be copied!

I usually get home at 10.30-11 pm via the gym or circus school. When I'm not exercising, I go to baroque vocal concerts or opera/theatre/circus performances (it's great living in London!), eat out or cook for friends at home. My partner Tasso is a cyclist; he doesn't like the gym and gets vertigo ... well they say opposites attract. I go to bed at 1-2 am; I'm definitely an owl and not a lark.

I wouldn't quit dentistry to perform full time – I could never train that hard! – but I do wish I'd discovered circus arts before I was in my forties.

INTERVIEW BY KATE QUINLAN