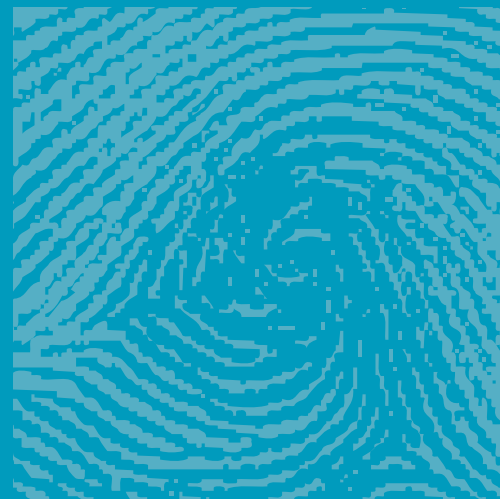


Snapshot

Dr Jane Chalmers
Associate Professor: Special Needs Dentistry



What do I do?

I'm the Director of Special Needs Dentistry, and my primary job is to provide leadership and professional support for special needs dentistry in this State. Special Needs Dentistry is almost non-traditional dental care. Our patients are often medically compromised and are people who are intellectually, physically or mental disabled, or frail and functionally dependent older people. Some of the patients have had difficult, traumatic and distressing times in their lives, and sometimes oral health can be part of that.

Day to day?

I do some clinical work and treat patients and I do administration. I'm running research projects and I'm also teaching undergraduate and post graduate dental students so I prepare lectures and resources for teaching.

What was my career path?

I went to the University of Melbourne for my undergraduate dentistry degree, then worked in private practice in Collins Street, but that didn't do a lot for me. I started working in Special Needs Dentistry in Sydney with people with drug and alcohol problems, with prostitutes in the Cross, with the mentally ill and the homeless and with nursing home residents. I did a masters at the University of Iowa in Dental Public Health and Geriatrics, and came home to Australia and did a PhD at the University of Adelaide.

What do I like most about my role?

This is a great area of dentistry to be in—anything you do helps people, so it's really rewarding. The best thing about my job is being able to help lots of people so their quality of life is improved—that's basically the reason I do this.

It's not necessarily by the book dentistry, it's dentistry that is going to be realistic, and will work well for people and their carers. You get out of the confines of a dental surgery, and you're out and about providing care in the community.

What would I change about my role?

A big problem with Special Needs Dentistry is that a lot of dental professionals haven't been trained in it. I had to go overseas for my training, so what we really need to be doing across Australia is establishing better undergraduate teaching, and establishing post graduate level specialty programs.

What skills do I need in my job?

You really need to know a lot about the medical conditions and social situations of people which really broadens your horizons about the dental care that you're providing. Communication skills are really very important, and I'm ambidextrous which helps me clinically.

Basically, Special Needs Dentistry is about dedication, and a love of the community, wanting to do good for other people.

Want more information?

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