

A close-up photograph of a blue nitrile glove, showing its textured surface. The glove is positioned diagonally across the frame. Overlaid on the glove is the text 'AGENT OF GERM WARFARE'. 'AGENT OF' is in a light blue, sans-serif font. 'GERM' is in a large, white, bold, sans-serif font with a slight drop shadow. 'WARFARE' is in a large, red, bold, sans-serif font with a slight drop shadow.

AGENT OF  
**GERM**  
**WARFARE**



In dentistry, you name it, there is an award for it. Apart from one crucial area: cleanliness. **Caroline Holland** went to meet a member of the dental team seldom in the limelight.

“Chertsey Dental Practice is the cleanest practice I have ever set foot in,” says Sheila Scott\*, dental business consultant. ‘Chertsey’s cleaner, Jan Sherwood, is a role model worthy of a plinth.’

Meeting Jan, I was reminded of the signs you see in some businesses: *You don’t have to be mad to work here, but it helps.* One of the first things Jan admits to is being fanatical, before also agreeing that it’s what makes her so good at her job.

So what exactly does she mean by fanatical? We could start with the amount spent on cleaning materials, anti-bacterial spray, and air fresheners. Her employer, principal dentist Phil Marsh, will readily tell you that what the practice spends on cleaning materials has doubled since he employed Jan.

Since one of the comments most frequently made to him by his patients is how clean the practice is, he has no concerns. ‘Patients very rarely ask about your cross-infection control but you can see them giving the place a visual once-over and since Jan has been here, they are noticeably impressed.’

#### Devotion to scrubbing

Her fanaticism is also reflected in her devotion to scrubbing. The walls of the practice are subjected to obsessive scrubbing and rubbing and Jan ensures that by the time she leaves the practice, there is not one single scuff mark anywhere.

Jan washes the floors every day but once every few months, she gets out her most abrasive scrubbing brush and removes the top layer of floor polish, and then applies more layers of polish until every little bit of floor is gleaming. ‘Well,’ says Jan. ‘You see you have to be fanatical. You have to

## CLEANING TIPS FROM JAN

- A two-surgery practice needs at least ten hours of cleaning a week
- Ensure your cleaner is part of the team – communication on cleanliness is very important
- Open windows regularly to clear the air, especially in winter when patients come in with colds
- Newspapers and magazines can harbour bacteria and should be replaced regularly
- A long 'fluffy' will remove the cobwebs in high places which may be invisible to some but not to the keen-sighted
- Wear absorbent cotton gloves inside the rubber gloves to protect your own hands.



be a little bit off your head to do it like that.'

As for any possible bacterial presence, there is no chance. Jan is herself anxious about what germs might be lingering in the practice and will wear rubber gloves until she has cleaned

all the hand-rails, all the switches, the phones, the handles and the sills. If it's

had human contact, it gets cleaned. She has her own box of disposable latex gloves to clean in the toilets.

### Checking every speck

To say that Jan takes pride in her job would be a massive understatement. Her husband is a window-cleaner and when he comes to collect her at the end of the day, she will bring him in to check that every speck has been removed from the reception carpet. Together they take home anything non-clinical which will benefit

from a more thorough clean in the dishwasher.

Jan has been a patient of the practice since she was a child and has known Phil for many years. She started cleaning for him on a trial basis after contract cleaners let him down and having got the practice to the standard of cleanliness that she is happy with, Jan was not going to allow anyone else do the job.

Which is just as well for Phil and his team, who value Jan not just for the all-important contribution she makes through her work but as a colleague, friend and sounding board.

## THE CLEANER AND THE REGULATIONS

As the author of a book on cross-infection control and a member of the team at Dental Protection Ltd, David Croser believes that the role of the cleaner in the practice should not be overlooked.

He advises that the cleaner should be made aware of the practice waste disposal protocol. If your cleaner does handle your clinical waste, they should have the same hepatitis vaccinations as the rest of the team.

'There have been instances of cleaners suffering from a needle-stick injury when a sharp has been put in the wrong bin, so clear protocols for the cleaner are imperative,' says David.

It's also worth bearing in mind, he says, that some cleaning materials, such as bleach, are hazardous and should be listed as part of the COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002) assessment and carefully stored in the practice.

## THE CONSULTANT AND CLEANLINESS

'Every time she walks into a dental practice, dental business consultant Sheila Scott is looking out for evidence that the practice cares enough about patients to maintain absolute cleanliness. She explains: 'Dental teams think that patients judge them on matters such as punctuality and whether there is coffee or a good magazine to read but actually, patient trust can be lost immediately if the dental practice environment is not clean and safe.'

'It's my role to help teams look after every aspect of customer care and communication in the practice and cleaners should always be included. I am delighted that *Vital* has decided to feature Jan Sherwood because she is exceptional. Via the *Vital* letters page, it will be interesting to hear about other dental environments and how they ensure cleanliness.'

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