

In this extract Barbara Huntley describes the practices she worked in as a dental nurse in the 1940s.

TRACK 01 – 00:00:01 – 00:02:45

Okay Barbara, we're back in Catford, it's 1946, and you've applied for this job which you get, you started work, can you tell us what sort of things you did in the practice?

It was most--, very much mostly extractions and dentures. You've got to remember that the war had not long finished, rationing was still in, and hmmm, people had never--, hadn't been to the dentist for years and it was a very poor neighbourhood as well. It was--, it was a time of quite upheaval, so mostly it was extractions, people's mouths were in pretty poor condition. So we did a lot of extractions, a lot of anaesthetics, full full, which the doctor used to come for.

And this is full mouth clearance?

Yes, full full, yes. And the dentist was obviously--, he was excellent at replacement dentures, they still had a choice of vulcanite, or if they could afford it they would have acrylic. And I still remember, we had lots of vulcanite dentures coming in with the rubber suction disc on the top which replaced--, which I think cost seven and six pence, which is about 30-odd p now. We didn't have a steriliser, which I did find quite strange, we just had blue glass jars with, I think Lysol in them which I changed every day, washed the forceps and put them in.

So, in the practice you worked in, in Ruislip, did they have a steriliser?

Yes, that was a--, must have been quite a new practice, it was extremely up to date, and we certainly had a steriliser there, and a very modern gas machine, whereas the one in New Cross, I can remember it so well, it was just more or less two cylinders, and two rubber bags on wheels, you know, which we pushed in. I think the rubber bags had sort of nets on them if I'm not mistaken. Very, very basic, everything was very basic, we had just [laughs] it sounds quite unbelievable these days, but the needles we used, we had a long and a short which were only changed once a day, and everybody--, every patient shared them. They were replaced in the jar, into the Lysol, but everybody shared them, which is just unthinkable, you know.