

New dentists find Orkney is Poles apart from home

by **BRIAN FLETT** and
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THE two Polish dentists, who arrived to work in Orkney last month, are adapting well to life in the islands.

Bogna Poczekaj-Ryszczuk admits to being the oldest of the latest batch of 13 dentists to come over from Poland to work in Scotland.

She is based at the new Stromness Dental Surgery at Garson.

Her recruitment process began back in December, when she and another Polish dentist, Michal Meszka, came over to Orkney for a weekend to have job interviews. They then kept in touch with NHS Orkney by e-mail, while they undertook an English language course in Poland, followed by a month-long dental induction course in Dundee.

Bogna told Orkney Today: "I have managed to settle in here, with the great help of Moya Nelson and NHS Orkney. They helped me to find a house to rent in Stromness. It is a very old house. (42 Dundas Street - which used

to belong to Eliza Fraser who was shipwrecked in Australia and gave her name to Fraser Island, off the Queensland coast.) I have found Stromness to be a very nice place and I have a nice view of the sea. Every day, I can see the ferry Hamnavoe turning around in the harbour.

She added: "Everyone has been so nice to us, and welcomed us with open arms. The staff here have helped me so much too. I am also so happy, that with Moya's help, I have been able to buy a car. So now I can go to Kirkwall or anywhere else to do something. I like to paint. So I'd like to join an association or go on a course. I also want to learn to make the special Orkney chairs because there is one in my house in Stromness. They are so beautiful. I also like to dance, so I'd love to learn some traditional Orkney dances. I also love to watch all the local birds and I want to know their names."

But although Bogna is settling in well here, she still has several reasons to think about her former life in Poland.

"I have left behind my home and my dogs. I know it is very difficult

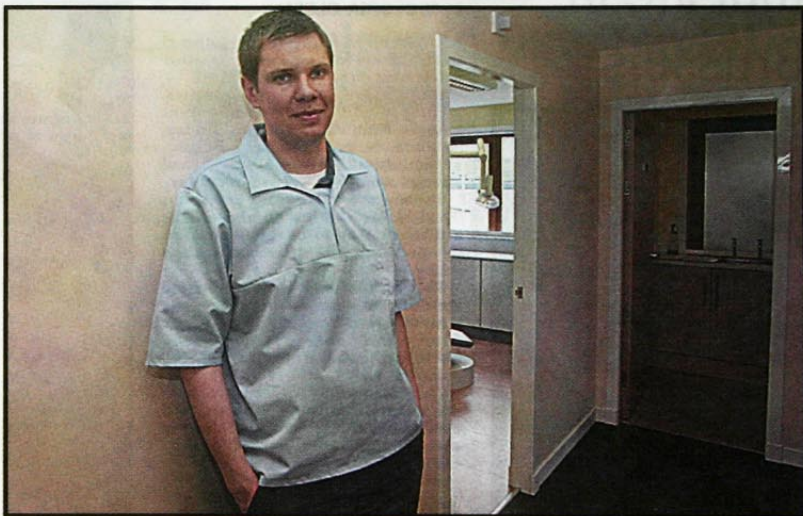
to bring them here because they would have to be in quarantine for six months. I would have to choose which one to take, and I have three and I love them all. So I'm not going to bring them. But I'm glad that my partner, Stanislav Senator, is in Orkney at the moment. He is here for two months. He is a retired policeman. I have a house in Poland which he has to look after. I am hoping to be able to go to Poland once or twice a year, and he will come here for about the same. Once I've stayed here for a couple of years, I would think about buying a house in Orkney - a small one.

Bogna Poczekaj-Ryszczuk has had a varied career as a dentist in Poland. She has treated prisoners' teeth in the country's biggest prison and other NHS work. But she also ran her own private dental practice.

She concluded by saying: "I don't think the move was about salary. But maybe about a better pension. The pension in Poland is really awful. It was a very spontaneous decision to come to Scotland. I had been in Turkey, lying on the beach, and I thought I'd like to change something in my life, just to challenge myself, to have an adventure. After a couple of years living behind the Iron Curtain, now I have a choice to see some new places. Besides this, I had heard that Orkney was a beautiful place - with the nature and the archaeological sites. Ten years ago, I went to Edinburgh for a month, on holiday because my friends were living here. So here I am now."

Michal Meszka took up a permanent post with NHS Orkney at the Station Dental Centre in Kirkwall eight weeks ago.

"Orkney is a nice place and very friendly, I'm, enjoying it very much," said Michal. "I'm from Gdansk, which is a big city, so it's very different here. Life here is better, healthier and with less stress," he continues. "Living in Scotland is easier than Eastern Europe, you have more experience with democracy and law; in Poland



MICHAL MESZKA is settling in to Kirkwall life and looking forward to his wife and two young sons visiting Orkney this summer.

we have a similar life and facilities, but we are still growing."

Michal says that although there is a lot of work for dentists in Poland, a lot of professionally qualified people go abroad to work because they'll receive a better rate of pay and have a higher standard of living.

"Teeth are the same in both countries and the problems people have with teeth are similar, but the equipment and materials here are better," he says. "The number of staff working in surgeries is also better, in Poland we would only have one dental nurse, who would also act as receptionist."

Michal has been less fortunate in finding affordable accommodation than Bogna. Although he is currently in NHS accommodation, Michal is looking for a home suitable for his family - his wife and two young sons, aged three-and-a-half and two years old

- who are still based in Poland.

"It's very difficult to be away," says Michal. "But I phone and e-mail a lot, communication with Poland is easy. My family have been here already and they liked it and are coming back over for the summer. People are very friendly and open and it's a very safe place. Also, it's easier to find activities here than it would be in a big city; I like sports and have already taken up sailing!"

Another two dentists are due to start work in Orkney this August. One position is a three-year post from the Fellowship of Remote Rural Dentistry, while the other will be a one-year vocational post, providing further training for a recent dental graduate.

There is a third Polish dentist working in Orkney - at the Earls Palace private dental practice.

Moya Nelson, NHS Orkney's chief administrative dental officer,

is delighted that Bogna and Michal are finding it so easy to fit in here. She told Orkney Today: "It is lovely that they have both settled in so well. They are both such lovely people."

"I've enjoyed the experience of just getting to know them, before they actually came over. Their presence here is making a big difference to the dentists who are here already, in that they can see that there is light at the end of the tunnel."

"We've had so many people off on maternity leave and sick leave that we've got a huge backlog. I think realistically it will be 2007 before we actually come 'out of the woods'. But the arrival of these additional dentists cheers the whole team up, morale goes up because we are seeing that we are going to be able to make a difference."



BOGNA POCZEKAJ-RYSZCZUK meeting Scottish First Minister Jack McConnell at the opening of the Garson Dental Surgery last month.