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As a company we've been involved in providing face-to-face and online safeguarding courses to dental practices for over six years and are often asked 'what are the advantages and disadvantages involved?'

In our case, we are uniquely positioned to answer such a question as we offer both child protection and vulnerable adult training courses to dental staff in both online and face-to-face form. The courses are essentially the same, with just the method of delivery changing.

In this article we have detailed the pros and cons of both approaches. In doing so we have assumed you would employ a trainer to come to your practice but many of the points below are equally valid if you send staff to external courses to be trained.

Face-to-face training

The primary advantage of face-to-face training is that the trainer can deal with any questions and tailor their approach to the participants. However, this does depend somewhat on the quality of the trainer employed. In our own case we employ only current practitioners who are qualified trainers - but that isn't the case across the board. We would therefore advise dental practices to engage only established reputable training companies and where that isn't possible, to check the credentials of any trainer before engaging them.

Face-to-face training also gives you the ability to effectively 'sheep dip' everyone at the same time, particularly if you have a trainer come into your practice, so you know everyone's training is bang up to date. Unfortunately this approach can have its drawbacks as if someone is ill or unable to attend the training session on the day, then your training costs effectively double, as you'll need to get the trainer back in.

In the safeguarding sector, it is common for face-to-face course certificates to have three-

year validity rather than the two-year validity of most online courses.

Online training

We have been involved with online training since 2008 but it was only with the onset of the recession that this method of training really took off, mainly because the costs per head for online training are so much less. Obviously this depends on how many staff you need to train and the maximum course size as dictated by the training provider.

As an example we charge £495 plus trainer's expenses plus VAT for any of the four safeguarding face-to-face courses we offer. The maximum number of participants is limited to 15 as we've found that, beyond this number, the learning experience is compromised. Doing the maths, if your practice had 15 staff and assuming trainers' expenses of around £100 (to keep the numbers simple) then the per-head cost would be around £40 plus VAT. This compares with the equivalent online course cost of just £16.50 plus VAT per person. Obviously this price differential widens if, like many practices, you have fewer

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than 15 staff to train or need to train staff in two batches so the practice can remain open.

As well as being more cost effective, your staff can also take an online course at a time that suits them. This is not only more convenient for them but can save the practice money too, as you don't have to have the staff in out of hours, or close the practice for a training session to take place. Interestingly, because online training can be taken at any time of day and generally started and stopped as needed, we find dental staff taking courses at quite unusual times – 3 am on a Christmas morning being a case in point!

The cost savings also extend to travelling expenses for your staff if the training is offsite: there simply aren't any to be reimbursed with online training.

Some online providers allow staff access to the online course content for three years should they need to refresh their memory at any time. This effectively serves as your staff's course notes and the reputable companies will keep these up-to-date.

If your practice is small you may not have a room of sufficient size to host the face-to-face training in and that will entail more cost to hire somewhere suitable. There's no cost for this with the online approach.

Finally, there's no waiting to get your staff trained. Pretty much, you can purchase online training and take it on the same day. No awkward synchronising of diaries and issuing a three line whip to make sure everyone is present.

Certificates

Evidencing to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) that your staff have taken the appropriate training and retained the knowledge is the main driver for most dental practices.

With most online training courses you get the peace of mind of knowing they've retained the knowledge via the requirement for them to pass an online assessment following the course. In our case retakes are also free with standards being maintained through the assessment changing each time. This is in contrast to a face-to-face course where, even if staff are issued a certificate, it just effectively signifies that they attended the course, not necessarily that they learned anything.

Child protection training

For courses taken with the ChildProtectionCompany.com, each successful participant also receives a personalised and portable certificate valid for two years for an online course and three

years for a face-to-face course. However, with the plethora of software packages now available in the market place, it's very easy for someone to produce a 'fake' certificate that appears authentic. To counter this, many online training providers, ourselves included, now issue uniquely numbered certificates so prospective employers and CQC can check the certificate is both authentic and applies to the individual named.

Keeping track of everyone's certificates is another big bugbear for practices. To help evidence staff training to CQC, we provide a single central training record that allows you to monitor everyone's progress through a single screen and provides duplicates of

everyone's certificates should anyone demand it. It gives full visibility of your staff progress at all times plus when their course certificate expires. The system also sends out automatic reminders before certificates expire to make sure no one's training inadvertently lapses in two years' time. Although we offer this system for both our face-to-face and online courses, we are fairly unique in doing so; most face-to-face training providers will just provide a paper certificate for the individual to keep. This sometimes applies to some online providers too, so it's best to check what management systems come with the training and where available, whether they're an additional cost.

Summary

Quite simply, dental staff and practices have voted with their feet and moved en masse to online training. Consequently, although we train thousands of dental staff every year, none of them are now via face-to-face courses. Every practice chose online training instead. In fact, we haven't had a face-to-face course run at a dental practice in the last two years.

Although cost is obviously a big factor in this decision, practices and dental staff are also rightly concerned that any course meets the stated CQC outcomes, is easy to use, provides CPD hours (with ours you get three per course for example) and is immediately available.

Of course not all online training courses are equal but with the better courses – those that are dental specific, meet CQC stated outcomes, provide management reporting and enable you to roll out the courses now and pay later – why would you pay more and opt for face-to-face training?

ChildProtectionCompany.com

The ChildProtectionCompany.com provides a range of safeguarding services for individuals and organisations in line with current child protection and vulnerable adult legislation. Anyone who works directly or indirectly with children, young people and families can be trained in around an hour.

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Backed by a multi-agency team of experienced safeguarding professionals, ChildProtectionCompany.com has been in the business of providing high quality, value for money safeguarding courses and support since 2008, providing over 25,000 courses to date.

It is recommended that dental receptionists and admin staff take the Introductory level course 'Introduction to Adult/Child Protection' and that dentists, dental nurses, dental hygienists and dental therapists take both the Introductory and Further course 'Further Adult/Child Protection'.

Both courses have been approved as meeting the educational criteria required for verifiable CPD and each represents three hours of verifiable CPD.

Visit https://www.childprotectioncompany.com/CPC/page_auth?PAGE=DentalTraining or call 01327 223283 for more information.

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