

YOUR VIEW

Status of PCDs

compiled by
Caroline Holland

Practice Manager

Lisa Coupland, is a job-sharing practice manager with Hannah Posnett at Waterside Dentalcare, Penryn, Cornwall

'At Waterside we are very progressive, there is a lot of emphasis on training and we are encouraged to do courses to increase our qualifications. For a practice to work, ideas from the whole populace of the practice have to be shared. As a team you need to move forward collectively. The hygienists and therapists are highly regarded and are helping to build an important perio side to the business – but we are all relied upon... We don't have a receptionist so we are the face of the practice. You do get one or two people who see you as a glorified receptionist and look down on you but that happens in any profession. If you can't deal with that, you are in the wrong job.'

Hygienist

Caroline Cliffer, a hygienist working in three practices in the Lymington area and a former president of the British Dental Hygienists Association

'The status of PCDs is very much dependent on the individual dentist. As the dental hygiene profession reaches its 60th anniversary it's clear that the status of hygienists has risen considerably. More dentists are working alongside a hygienist, taking a preventive approach to patient care. However, patients need to be referred in the first place and considering a large percentage of the population have periodontal problems it's of concern that there are dentists (worryingly this includes younger dentists) who do not refer patients on a regular basis. Teamworking is growing, and with an enthusiastic dentist, works well; but when there are hygienists talking of burn-out and isolation, there is a long way to go.'

Technician

Simon Newbold, a technician working as a sole trader in the West End of London

'I notice now ...my best clients tend to be the ones who also work well with their staff. The working relationship is definitely better and more open with everyone in the practice. With some of my clients, I go to the practice, meet the patient and that works well. But there are still some dentists who are only interested in how cheaply the work is done. There can be an 'us and them' attitude amongst dentists, there are different attitudes in Europe, such as Switzerland and Germany, where the laboratory profession is respected ...The technician's role should be more integrated into the dental team. For me, it's difficult to see how the status of PCDs is changing because we are so often on the outside, working on our own.'



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**Chris Hendry,
Receptionist**

Dental Nurse

Suzanne Gaston, dental nurse at the practice of Fiona Simpson in Ballymena, NI

'I think the dental team is more professional nowadays; as a result of qualifications our roles are changing and we have more status. Patients are treating us differently and we get to know them better... Now the patients have a relationship with the team as well as the dentist. It's good for Fiona too, because she knows she can rely on us. Those practices where qualifications are not valued are going to have a big shock. But here things seem to be really changing fast. Northern Ireland is such a small province and everyone is talking about registration and getting their staff qualified. Fiona is excellent and makes sure we keep standards as high as possible. We all like it in this practice and have been here for years and that is good for patients, who like continuity and seeing the same faces.'

Therapist

Irene Ellis, therapist in the Community Dental Service in Portsmouth and the immediate past president of the British Association of Dental Therapists

'How I see the dental profession at the moment is like a pyramid with the dentist at the top and the staff below. But the shape I would like to compare the profession with is a circle with the patient in the middle and all the staff around the patient with equal respect for each other. In the end we are all there to serve the patient. But I think we are a long way from that. The General Dental Council still describes the dentist as the team leader... Things have changed dramatically for therapists since July 2002. Now that we are able to work in general practice more than 100 therapists have returned to the profession. Nurses will feel more valued when they are registered. They will be more accountable and will be treated as professionals in their own right. All these changes are raising standards in the profession.'

Receptionist

Chris Hendry, receptionist at Oralcare, Martin Fallowfield's practice in Peterborough, a role she shares with Dawn Biggs.

'I think the practice receptionist is vital because without us, the dentist would not know what they were doing! I think this is true of all practices but the role can vary from just telephone-answering and making appointments to so much more... Martin trusts us to run the practice and talk to patients in his absence. But we know where to draw the line and when a patient should be talking to the dentist or hygienist. Being a receptionist is so much about personality and commonsense, I am not sure that you could learn that on a course. I learned what to do as I went along - and boy have I learned! I am not sure that registration of dental receptionists is worthwhile. In a practice like this, there is no doubt about our status.'



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