Well trained

As team members enjoy increased responsibility, the dentist's responsibility to ensure training takes place increases also, reports **Gordon Watkins**.

In recent years, the General Dental Council (GDC) has been committed to a series of reforms regarding PCDs. These reforms are having, and will have, a significant impact on the education and training of the dental team.

Since July 2002, dental hygienists and dental therapists have been permitted to undertake extended duties, such as the taking of impressions. Hygienists and therapists are only allowed to undertake these extended duties once they have received the necessary training.

The employing or supervising dentist, as the leader of the dental team, has a responsibility to ensure that hygienists and therapists are appropriately trained. Training in the extended duties is provided by the dental schools and dental hospitals, as well as by postgraduate centres.

More far-reaching PCD reforms are planned, with a provisional implementation date of autumn 2004. These reforms include:

- ◆ mandatory GDC registration for dental nurses and dental technicians;
- ◆ the creation of two new classes of PCD – 'orthodontic therapists' (working under the direction of orthodontists) and 'clinical dental technicians'; and
- ◆ a new regulatory framework for PCDs.

The GDC will hold two separate registers one for dentists and one for PCDs. See page 16 for details.

All PCDs will still have to work under the direction of a dentist. Every registrant will be responsible to the GDC for practising within the limits of their competence, and for the procedures undertaken. Dentists will be additionally responsible to the GDC for ensuring that colleagues in teams they lead do not, and are not asked to, undertake practice beyond their competence.

PCD educational curricula will define the knowledge, skills and aptitudes that a PCD must have on first registration. There will be no barriers to PCDs expanding their range of skills through recognised training and experience. A modular approach across PCD training routes will be encouraged. There will be clear ethical

guidance to dentists and PCDs on their roles and responsibilities.

All PCDs on the PCD register will be required to undertake a compulsory minimum number of hours of Continuing Professional Development, but the precise details have yet to be established.

Under the current regulatory framework, procedures amounting to the practice of dentistry can only be carried out by a registered dentist – or by an enrolled dental hygienist or therapist. Hygienists and therapists can only perform those duties permitted in the appropriate part of the Dental Auxiliaries Regulations. The existing regulations state that hygienists and therapists may only carry out permitted dental work under the direction of a registered dentist, and after the dentist has examined the patient and made a written prescription.

Under the reforms, registered dentists, hygienists and therapists will be permitted to carry out procedures amounting to the practice of dentistry (with hygienists and therapists working to a dentist's prescription), just as now. Additionally, clinical dental technicians will be allowed to take impressions under the dentist's direction. Regulation through prescriptive lists of permitted duties will be replaced by regula-

tion through educational curricula and ethical guidance (i.e. Maintaining Standards).

The title 'dental nurse' will be reserved to people with registrable qualifications (as detailed on page 19), plus those admitted under the transitional arrangements.

Transitional entry of dental nurses onto the mandatory register will be possible for two years after it opens. There will be 'grandparenting' arrangements for those who have no formal qualifications but who can demonstrate proven experience of working satisfactorily for a period of at least four years full-time (or the equivalent period part-time) in the previous eight years.

Dentists are advised to ensure as soon as possible that the nurses they employ are qualified for registration or are working towards a registrable qualification, if they are not covered by the transitional arrangements.

There is now automatic Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding for NVQs/SVQs for under-18s, which is obtained through the assessment centre (in Scotland, this money comes from Local Enterprise Companies rather than the LSC). In England, some funding should be available from NHS Workforce Development Confederations (WDCs; now part of Strategic Health Authorities).