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Learner of the Year
2010 Joanne Holroyd
tells **Arveen Bajaj** what
good dental practice
management means at
Meltham Dental Care.

2010 has been an eventful year so far for Joanne Holroyd, practice manager of Meltham Dental Care, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire. In April, she won the Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) Learner of the Year 2010 award at a glittering City and Guilds dinner in London. Joanne won the title in recognition of the outstanding results she has achieved through putting her management training into practice. She received her trophy in front of an audience of 500 people including Ralph Bauer, ILM Chairman, and Jake Humphrey, the BBC Sports presenter. Joanne also picked up a second award, one of the coveted City and Guilds Lion Awards, in recognition of her achievements.

Joanne's success follows a route of training and studying which has brought her to her current position and consequent accolades. After qualifying as a trainee dental nurse in 1990, she continued to take further qualifications in oral health education and dental radiography. As many dental nurses do, she took on more responsibility and in 1997 became practice manager, carrying out this role with no formal training.

She says, 'In December 2006 the practice was sold and the principal wanted me to look at doing a formal management

management underpins clinical dentistry'

qualification. After researching various qualifications, we started the ILM level 7 Diploma in Executive Management in November 2007' - which Joanne describes as a fairly intense two day course.

'After the first session I was really concerned that I would not have the academic ability to complete the course. But as I started to read around the subject and put things into practice it all became a lot clearer. I attended the course alongside my principal so it was extremely helpful to have his support in putting things into place. After all, the point of doing the course was to improve my management skills and the management of the practice.'

Joanne was the first practice manager in England to achieve the ILM level 7 Diploma in Executive management. UMD Professional nominated her for the ILM Learner of the Year Awards - and she was delighted to learn that she had won the Learner of the Year title for England together with a Medal of Excellence from City and Guilds.

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Joanne's team

Meltham Dental Care is a busy NHS practice with four surgeries. The team consists of Joanne, four dentists including the principal, a foundation dentist, a dental therapist and nine auxiliary staff.

The team is committed to developing the practice and the team. The principal, Baljinder Dhesi, is now doing a restorative diploma with the Royal College of Surgeons as well as the MJDF and the associates also attend regular courses to update their knowledge and skills.

The nursing and reception staff are also encouraged to develop their skills further, undertaking NVQs in customer service and business administration and further clinical qualifications such as oral health education and radiography.

Joanna says, 'For the practice to develop I feel we need to have the right people and skills mix, so further education and training is the way forward. Although the title is still the same, my role has changed immensely over the past two years. With the knowledge I have gained through doing the diploma I have gained a greater confidence in my role as I now have the knowledge to support it. The principal can have confidence in knowing that the practice is being run effectively and efficiently while he concentrates on the dentistry and the clinical function.'

A pivotal role

As practice manager Joanne now has both an operational and strategic role. Her days can vary. In a typical week they might include holding a

UMD Professional

UMD Professional consultants have been providing training and consultancy services in dentistry for nearly 20 years. In 2005 they created a suite of management qualifications accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management, designed to meet the needs of dentists and managers at all levels within dental practice and business. Their unique 'hands on' approach focuses on the practical application of management theory, an approach which has helped some 600 practices achieve the Investors in People standard. One UMD Professional ILM student reached the London finals of the National Training Awards in 2002 and in 2010 Joanne Holroyd was named ILM Learner of the Year.

meeting with the dental nurses to discuss any issues that have arisen and to update them on any business plans; having one or two monthly review meetings or appraisals with members of the team; arranging training sessions from information collated at the reviews and appraisals; or having a weekly meeting with the principal to discuss the business' future and to plan how to meet the business' objectives.

Joanne also updates policies or procedures and has spent time over the past few months working on the Department of Health's decontamination document HTM 01-05 to ensure they are working towards best practice.

Good management

In 2009, the practice achieved BDA Good Practice and has also achieved Investors in People accreditation. Joanne believes that good practice management has a very positive effect on the rest of the dental team and on the practice as a business.

She explains, 'Good management underpins good clinical dentistry and customer service and having a focus on effective management means that we all feel much more in control, particularly in these uncertain times.'

Practice principal Baljinder Dhesi agrees. He feels that good practice management allows principal dentists - who are usually first and foremost clinicians - to carry out the dentistry they enjoy without constantly worrying about what's happening with the practice. 'Even though some good management is common sense, business is an ever changing world and for this reason I believe further education in this field is essential to ensure you have a more structured approach. Following basic business principles can lead to greater improvements in business activities,' he says.

Trainee dental nurse Charlotte Ansell says that good practice management has helped her to develop her skills. She says, 'I have a weekly group meeting with the practice manager where we can discuss any issues and we are informed of any business plans. I also have a monthly review

where I can discuss on a one-to-one basis any problems I am having and any areas I feel or the dentists feel I may need to develop further.'

Charlotte is currently studying towards her NVQ level 3 in Oral Health Care Dental Nursing and the systems and protocols that are in place help her find the evidence required to complete her portfolio. 'I feel we work to a high standard and this is down to good management,' she says.

Joanne reiterates her colleagues' beliefs about the value of good practice management: 'Good management and leadership skills are not just desirable these days - both are essential in my view for practices to thrive in today's dental environment. As practices grow bigger and come under increased regulation, management responsibilities need to be thought about differently.'

'Business managers, who can work with principals or partners at a strategic level, and competent operational managers who can take responsibility for the day-to-day running of the practice will both have a role to play.'

'I hope we will also see a greater understanding of the importance of leadership by both dentists and practice managers in the future, with clarity of purpose and the involvement of all of the talents within the dental practice.'