

FOCUS AWARDS 2002



When one of your patients nominates you for an award, you know you must be doing something right. This is exactly how the staff at the Wessington Way Dental Practice must be feeling now. They were named as overall winners of the Focus Awards for Innovations in Dental Patient Care 2002, after an appreciative patient contacted the BDA. The practice only knew they were up for the award when the BDA wrote to them with the nomination form.

A FRESH START

So why did Wessington Way stand out from the other finalists? Martin Anderson, the practice owner, thinks that the real strength of the practice comes from the atmosphere being so team spirited and patient-centred. The practice had only been going for one year at the time of the ceremony, and a lot of their success has been attributed to the fact that they had had a blank sheet to start from.

The practice was built from scratch so could be designed to the specific requirements of a dental practice, and the whole approach meant that the team had the opportunity to be innovative. This was certainly a chance that Wessington Way were not going to let slip by. The practice is entirely on the ground floor to help avoid access problems and the doorways are all of an extra width so that pushchairs and wheelchairs can get through easily. The seating in the reception area is at three different heights so all ages have somewhere comfortable to sit while waiting.

Some of the team at Wessington Way show off their merchant navy style uniforms



PATIENTS HAVE THEIR SAY

Another strength of the practice is the practice forum. This is made up of five patients who meet up regularly with the management team and are fully included

in the decision making at the practice (they are even involved in staff appraisals). They have proved very effective at both coming up with great ideas for the service at the same time as stopping them doing some things which could have proved disastrous. The forum is a group of specially selected people. Martin explains 'We chose people who would really tell us what they thought.' One lady is a wheelchair user and gives a good perspective of access problems that can be difficult to foresee. One example of this was to put a mirror at wheelchair height in the accessible cloakroom. Something else that the practice forum instigated was a letter that is sent to people who do not attend their appointments. When the forum were told how many people missed appointments they drew up a letter to send to people who did not attend. This is signed from the forum chairman, not the practice. The forum is included in many social events – 'this helps them feel involved in the practice.'



Sharon, Practice Supervisor sharing tea with a young patient in front of the pirate's cave.

The Focus Awards is a joint initiative between the Department of Health of England and the British Dental Association. It was set up to recognise and celebrate the innovative patient-focused projects being carried out across England.



Some members of the patient's forum voice their opinions to Tara, the Team Supervisor

REFLECTING LOCAL HISTORY

The practice is built on the site of the old Sunderland shipbuilders, close to the River Wear and this has inspired a nautical theme. This themed environment makes the patients feel more at ease, and gives the practice a fun and relaxed atmosphere. The reception desk is in the shape of a ship, the floor has a decking-style covering and the children's play area is a pirate's cave. To top it all, the staff uniforms are modelled on that of the merchant navy. The staff think it is great. Practice Supervisor, Sharon Taylor says, 'People always comment and ask where we work if they see us out of the practice. It's good for marketing the practice.'

REACHING ALL PATIENTS

As well as the needs of those patients with mobility difficulties, the practice have thought about those with hearing impairments too. They have a text-direct service, where patients text a message to BT, who then phone through with the message verbally. The system also works in reverse when the practice needs to contact the patient. When people with hearing difficulties arrive at the practice, there is a nurse on hand who is trained in sign language to help them feel at ease.

The clinical side of the practice is not short on innovations either. Digital x-rays are used so radiation dosage is kept to a minimum and images appear instantly, so

no developing or chemicals are involved. Areas of concern/interest can be digitally enhanced, zoomed in on and rotated or highlighted so the patient can understand the dentist's explanation of procedures more easily. The radiographs can then be printed out for the patient to take home if they wish. This is a particular favourite with the younger patients.

When they were building the practice a group of core staff who were interested in working at Wessington Way got together and drew up a wish-list. Years of working in different practices meant that the experienced staff knew what worked and what did not, what they wanted the practice to be like and what they did not

How the practices got involved

In order to participate, each entrant had to submit a nomination form specifying the innovations under the categories given below. Any practice that had applied last year was not allowed to use the same innovations in their application.

- Patient's experiences contacting the practice/clinic before, during and after treatment.
- Patient's experiences whilst in the reception or waiting area
- Patient's experiences during clinical treatment
- General communication with the patients
- Any other patient-focused innovation

want it to be like. The younger staff brought enthusiasm and fun. Occasionally, Martin gets the wish-list out, just to see how they are doing. 'We're doing very well' said Sharon. Their patients certainly seem to think so!

Naomi Davis



Some of the team in action