

FOCUS AWARDS 2002



The rules of the Focus Awards mean that if a practice is nominated for the award two years in a row, they must use completely different innovations in their applications. This sounds like a tall order; but not for the Strelley Dental Clinic. They found the difficult part of the application form deciding what to leave out. So how did they decide what to use in their application? 'We tried to include the things that we thought the judges were looking for', says Julia Wilkinson (Oral Health Promotions Co-ordinator) 'but the activities that we included on our application form are just a tiny bit of the work we do'.

In the time between the 2001 and 2002 Focus Awards, the Strelley dental clinic have gone from being a CDS clinic to being a CDS/PDS healthcare provider, showing that their innovative thinking goes into styles of delivery and how they can increase the number of people receiving their messages of dental health. To this end they have linked their services to different local healthcare suppliers covering: 15 clinics, a GA suite at the local hospital, GDPs, health visitors, speech therapists and staff at walk-in centres.

The Strelley Dental Clinic are catering for their whole local community with a 4-stage approach:

- Approaching the community at large through tooth brush exchange days and promotional stands at 'fun days'.
- Targetting children with specially devised 'tooth tasks', and a mini surgery for loan to schools and playgrounds.



Some of the Strelley team at a community event

- Supporting adults by providing a digital dental diary and an oral health literature collection'.
- Keeping staff up to date and involved in innovation.

THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE

The Strelley team take on as much community work as possible. All their clinics are encouraged to hold regular toothbrush exchange events, during which anyone from the local community can come to the clinic and change their old toothbrush for a new one. While they are there people can get advice from the staff on oral health matters. This works particularly well because the environment is informal and fun so people feel at ease to approach the staff. People can even look around at the dental suites. Flyers are distributed to encourage non-attenders to make the first step to becoming an attender, and staff can guide people in the right direction to find a dentist.

The Strelley dental clinic even take promotional stands to training events and local 'fun days', anything to help to raise the awareness of the good oral health message, and encourage people to use their local dental facilities.

CHILDREN

The staff at Strelley are keen to keep their child patients happy. To do this, developmental toys such as games and building blocks are kept in the waiting room for children to explore and learn with.

The staff have also devised a series of 'tooth tasks' which are activity sheets to encourage the children to find out about what goes on in their mouths. Along with all this, there are interactive wall charts with lift-up flaps helping to engage children in the idea of oral health. These wall charts cover topics such as 'I've got a wobbly tooth' and are changed every 6-8 weeks.



A young patient shows interest at a community event.

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.



A digital photo diary being recorded

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.

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

ADULTS

The Strelley team may be good at looking after their child patients, but their adults are not neglected. They are encouraged to take an interest in oral health and the waiting area has a collection of current oral health literature. The practice has a digital camera which is used to create a dental diary for all patients. This then forms a pictorial record of the progress that their treatment has made, and the patient is presented with their diary at the end of the treatment.

Adults with hearing difficulties are well catered for too, as staff have been trained to 'sign' to patients themselves. They still use a signing interpreter, but this way there is one less barrier between the patient and the dental staff, and patients feel that the

staff are on their side if they are greeted in their own method of communicating.

STAFF ADVANCEMENT IN INNOVATION

The staff attend regular training events to keep up to date on any new ideas that could be adopted by the clinic for the benefit of the patients. An example of this is the signing course mentioned above. Julia explains 'we are always changing and developing skills, always getting better'. After the Focus Award ceremony, the team spent the two-hour train journey home discussing more ideas to introduce into the practice. The Strelley practice are so innovative that they are even use their experience of the Focus Awards in an innovative way.

Naomi Davis



Some of the books and activities in the waiting room for children.

