

HR tips for dental practices

By Claire Davies¹

HR TIPS

Clare Davies provides human resources (HR) support to dental practice clients of the law firm where she works. In this article she outlines her top HR and employment law tips for dental practices with the acronym HR TIPS:

H – HR policies

R – Recognition

T – Time off

I – Issues with staff

P – Performance management

S – Stress

HR policies

We've witnessed an increase in demand from our clients who require assistance to draw up and maintain policies and procedures ahead of their routine three-yearly NHS inspection. It's imperative that you remain on top of these legal requirements and by doing so you remain not only in line with your obligations as a service provider and employer but they can also add value to the management of the practice, which in turn naturally frees up dentists to spend more time treating their patients.

Recognition

Recognition of staff progression and achievements through annual appraisals are a vital part of an effective HR strategy. When done correctly, appraisals can be a fantastic way to motivate your employees. It has been found that appraisal systems can also reduce employee turnover, diagnose training and development needs of the future as well as provide clarity about the expectations you have for your employees' performance.

From an employment law perspective, appraisals provide you with legal protection if you use them for the monitoring of performance and capability, as they can give you a paper trail to rely on.

Time off

Summer holidays are a busy time for annual leave requests but patient care must remain the same within practices. It can be difficult to make sure everyone gets the annual leave that they request, particularly in smaller practices at peak times such as school holidays and Christmas.

An employee has a right to statutory annual leave but as an employer, you can state when leave can or cannot be taken pending adequate notice being given. I would recommend a clear system in place for booking time off and if a request has to be declined, ensure the full reason and confirmation of the business need for the decision is provided to the individual.

Issues with staff

At some point every business owner and manager will need to address an awkward situation. Whether that's an unhygienic employee, a chatterbox, vulgar language or inappropriate dress, a difficult conversation can make the difference between success and failure for a valued employee.

If an issue must be discussed, I would suggest a quiet meeting explaining that you have some difficult feedback to share. To avoid legal situations, establish whether there are any underlying medical problems that may be covered under the Equality Act 2010 that are affecting the problem, should it relate to body odour or behaviour. Reach an agreement on what the employee will do to address the situation and what you as a business can do to help then set a review date and follow up.

Performance management

Performance management has a significant role to play in enhancing organisational performance and the system you use to align your business goals with the work of your employees should incorporate performance improvement, development and the

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management of behaviour in the workplace.

A Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) is designed to facilitate constructive discussion between a staff member and his or her supervisor, and can help to clarify any area of performance that needs to be improved.

A PIP includes clarifying your expectations, stating the support you will give the employee and specifying the consequences of not meeting expectations. It also documents that you have offered a sufficient level of support to your employee, and in the event that you are left with no other option but to dismiss, will provide clear evidence to an employment tribunal in rebutting a potential unfair dismissal claim.

Stress

Stress in the workplace is a major issue facing employers today. Not only does it have an impact on workplace morale and productivity, but it can make the cost of employee absence rise significantly. Each case of stress, anxiety or depression leads to an average of over 30 working days lost.

There are a number of things you can do as an employer to help manage stress and protect your business and workforce. Have a 'stress' policy in place and conduct regular risk assessments. Develop a supportive work ethos and ensure that you follow the Health & Safety Executive's (HSE) management standards guidelines. I would also suggest communicating regularly with staff in person rather than by email to add a human element to your HR procedures.

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