'A change of routine can lift the spirits'

Reader panel member and practice manager **Jodie Carr**¹ discusses the importance of fully involving dental nurses in everyday practice.

Introduction

Following an internet search of 'The role of a dental nurse' the following result appeared: *A dental nurse works closely with the dentist, providing assistance throughout a patient's visit. Assisting the dentist encompasses a wide range of procedures from preparing the various materials required and ensuring the proper instruments and equipment are available, to cleaning and sterilising the used instruments. - Global pre meds.*

Typically, when interviewing candidates for qualified and training positions in practice they too often feel their role is restricted to inside the surgery. I was disheartened to overhear dental nurses saying their jobs were simply 'glorified cleaners' at a recent conference. After reading online forums it seems that it isn't only the taboo subject of a dental nurse's salary causing them to leave the

industry, but often the repetitiveness of the nursing, boredom and a lack of progression.

When I sit down to conduct an interview or a personal development plan (PDP) with a trainee dental nurse or a newly qualified dental nurse, their future career options are often similar: post registration courses of radiography, oral health education and impression taking. These are all fantastic ways to expand the involvement of dental nurses, but often only mentioned because they are the only courses dental nurses are aware of or feel are available to them. Often dental nurses do not seem passionate about these post registration courses and it is unsurprising. After spending thousands on their dental nurse course, more courses can be costly and the skills they learn are not fully utilised. Sometimes dental nurses are simply happy with their current qualification and the thought of spending more money and the time commitment of undertaking courses is overwhelming. Many times dental nurses have told me they are happy in their role, however, the day to day routine can become repetitive.

Being able to recognise individual strengths within your dental nurses can be the key to building a strong, motivated workforce. Involving nurses with all aspects of the industry in return can encourage loyalty.

Everybody has strengths and weaknesses; usually an individual's strengths tend to bring them enjoyment and confidence and most of all a feeling of being VALUED.

Expanding roles Marketing and creative gurus

Although I am a practice manager I have no background in marketing. I have lots of ideas but not a single creative bone in my body. As a practice we encourage dental nurses' creative ideas. The dental nurses in my practices have created themed waiting rooms focusing on, for example, Mouth Cancer Action Month, smoking cessation, awareness of sugar, lunch box swap ideas, alcohol awareness - to name just a few! Patients enjoy seeing a different display each time they attend and they are a real talking point with the patients and practice team. We have a dental nurse who is a keen photographer and has taken photos for social media and our website, a skill she enjoys building upon and a saving to the practice. We also have dental nurses who have completed marketing qualifications and help create posters advertising, for example, tooth whitening offers or upcoming cosmetic evenings - again reducing costs to the practice and involving dental nurses in activities they are interested in. We work together as

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Rocks painted by the team and distributed into the community

Team Dementia Friends

Patient information leaflets designed by a dental nurse

An example of a board display created by dental nurses

The summer fete team outside the practice

a team to expand on one another's ideas and visions and bring them to life. The dental nurses create these on days when they are on decontamination duties or out of surgery days.

Community involvement

When recruiting dental nurses, it is important to look over their previous employment history for ideas to make full use of the skills they may have from working in other industries. For example, we have a dental nurse who holds a childcare certificate and her rapport with children is exceptional. She is an ideal candidate for visiting local nurseries and schools to give talks and advice to children. Such activities raise the practice profile, attract new patients and make the dental nurse feel appreciated and more fulfilled in her job role.

It is also great to encourage dental nurses to get involved within the community. Our dental nurses visited a local care home for a chat with residents and all of the nurses thoroughly enjoyed the change of scenery and felt a sense of accomplishment. The care home has since brought their residents to visit the practice and it is brilliant to see the rapport between the dental nurses and the residents. With the latest CQC reports on the declining oral health care in care homes, these visits are a great opportunity for dental nurses to make a difference to your community. Since the visit our dental nurses have all become Dementia Friends and wear their badges with pride.

Social history involvement

The ever growing demands of thorough note taking for clinicians are often eased by the help of dental nurses; often dental nurses type medical histories and complete charting. However, we have also trained our dental nurses to probe our patients regarding their social history. The results have been overwhelming; patients have been more forthcoming with their answers regarding smoking and alcohol intake with dental

nurses. The nurses have felt more involved in patient care, the surgery is run as a team instead of by an individual, and the positive impact has been an increase in referrals for smoking cessation advice.

Open days

Dental nurses who have an interest in cosmetic procedures are encouraged to help out for open evenings and events. When dental nurses are interested in procedures their enthusiasm shows. Nurses are encouraged to help with goody bags, poster ideas, demonstrating equipment and chatting to patients about their own experiences. We have found that when the dental nurses are actively involved in open days, solid rapports with patients are built and it is lovely to witness the dental nurses supporting the

patients through their whole journey. We have also held summer fete open days which all of the dental nurses thoroughly enjoyed - again, a change of routine can really lift the spirits.

Conclusion

The ideas I have discussed are only a few ways to expand your dental nurses' roles; they are inexpensive and involve simply recognising your dental nurses' individualities and strengths and adapting and including these skills into their everyday role. All dental nurses have different passions and personalities and are suited to different goals and opportunities. Being able to spot their individual talents and help them grow within their roles will maximise productivity in your dental practice.

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