



Online radiography for dental nurses

With the advent of compulsory registration for dental nurses, CPD is now a requirement, including at least five hours of dental radiography CPD per five year cycle. In 2005, the BDA developed an online course in dental radiography in an effort to help dental nurses with their radiographic training. Here Stephen Macdonald outlines this excellent way for nurses to develop their careers and comply with the new CPD regulations.

With the introduction of compulsory registration for dental nurses comes a compulsory requirement for nurses to record their continuing professional development (CPD). The General Dental Council (GDC) requires that all registered dental nurses now have to take part in at least 150 hours of CPD over a five year cycle and that 50 of those hours must be verifiable.

In addition, a certain amount of time must be devoted to particular subjects, namely:

- Medical emergencies (10 hrs per cycle)
- Disinfection and decontamination (5 hrs per cycle)
- Radiography and radiation protection (5 hrs per cycle).

It is important to stress that the third requirement applies to *all* registered dental

nurses, even those who are not directly involved in taking radiographs. For those who are involved in taking radiographs there are even more regulations to adhere to, particularly when it comes to training.

What is 'adequate training'?

Since 2001, all dental nurses involved in taking radiographs must be 'adequately trained'. The definition of an 'adequately trained' dental nurse, according to the National Radiological Protection Board, is one who 'possesses a Certificate in Dental Radiography conforming to the syllabus prescribed by the College of Radiographers'. The most widely recognised qualification is the National Examining Board for Dental Nurses (NEBDN) Certificate in Dental Radiography. This qualification was created in 2005 by a working group of representatives



from the NEBDN, the British Dental Association (BDA), the British Society of Dental and Maxillofacial Radiology (BSDMFR) and the College of Radiographers.

The NEBDN Certificate of Dental Radiography entitles dental nurses to take all common types of radiographs using both traditional film and digital equipment. The Certificate has two parts:

- A portfolio of 60 radiographs, including three detailed case studies
- A one hour multiple-choice examination, consisting of 35 negatively-marked questions.

Examinations are held in June and December each year at examination centres around the UK.

So how can nurses learn about this subject and prepare for the NEBDN qualification? Since 2005, the BDA has run an online course in dental radiography for dental nurses. The course has been developed by Mr Eric Whaites, Senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant in dental radiology at the King's College London Dental Institute. The course consists of 25 online modules, each around

half an hour long, taken over a period of eight weeks (see box 1). The course has been designed to be extremely user-friendly: all students need is regular access to a computer with a broadband internet connection. The BDA provides all necessary learning materials, including a copy of Mr Whaites' textbook *Dental radiography and radiology for dental nurses*.

Assessment, support, results

The vast majority of students have never taken part in an online course before, so great care is taken to provide support whenever it is needed. Expert tutors send weekly advice emails and keep an eye on each student's progress. Students can contact the BDA by email or phone should they have any questions on any topic or if they just need some reassurance that they are doing well. Self-assessment tests are also provided to help students check their understanding of the subject, and all students are given a chance to sit mock exams online as practice for the NEBDN examination.

Since the course was launched in 2005,

it has helped over 1,000 nurses learn about dental radiography. The course has a consistently high pass rate of 85% and feedback from students is overwhelmingly positive. In fact, around 70% of students join the course after a recommendation from a friend or colleague. An online course is extremely flexible and fits easily around a busy working and home life. The modules can be viewed at any time of day or night, and can be paused or repeated as many times as necessary.

The students come from all types of dental practices right across the UK, as well as a substantial number of students taking the course overseas. Some are in Germany and Cyprus with the Armed Forces, and a group of students from Bermuda were recently enrolled. Wherever the students are based, they all find it easy and convenient to learn about dental radiography with the BDA's online course. Many alumni have used the course to enhance their careers or as a springboard to hygiene and therapy qualifications and the BDA are delighted with the number of former students who contact them to tell them how they are using their new skills and how they

Box 1 About the online course in dental radiography

- Eight week online course
- All learning materials and student support included
- Seven courses throughout the year
- £425 for staff of BDA members
- £475 for all other nurses
- Course brochure and application forms available at www.bda.org/education
- Email radiography.enquiries@bda.org or call 0207 563 6896 for more information.

Box 2 Topics which must be covered by a radiography CPD update course

- a) The principles of radiation physics
- b) Risks of ionising radiation
- c) Radiation doses in dental radiography
- d) Factors affecting dose in dental radiography
- e) The principles of radiation protection
- f) Statutory requirements
- g) Quality assurance.

From Guidance notes for dental practitioners on the safe use of X-ray equipment. National Radiological Protection Board, 2001

are taking on more roles and responsibilities in their practices.

Essential CPD

Now that CPD for dental nurses is compulsory, the BDA award a certificate for 40 CPD hours to all students who complete the online course. But not every nurse will need to take a course which leads to a radiography qualification. All dental nurses have to spend at least five hours learning about dental radiography, so the BDA plans to launch a series of one hour online CPD courses to help all nurses keep up-to-date and satisfy the GDC CPD requirements (see box 2). Details will be available on the BDA website and the CPD courses will be available in Autumn 2008. The aim is for all nurses to be able to learn about dental radiography at a pace which suits them.

If you would like to know more about the BDA's online courses for dental nurses, please visit www.bda.org/education or telephone 0207 563 6896. 📞

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