

Celebrations are, as their name suggests, occasions for merriment, partying and festivities. However, when it comes to 'team celebrations' things may not always be so straightforward, discovers **Stephen Hancocks**.

Team celebrations



I've never seen a statistical breakdown of it, but I suspect that members of the dental team have as much, or as little, to celebrate in the course of a year than any other group of colleagues or workmates. After all there's no reason to think otherwise. We each have a birthday ('he's how old? Is that all, he looks about 90'), anniversaries ('did you know she's been working here 17 years - imagine that!') and a variety of other achievements to share and observe. Oh what fun! Well, possibly, but for a start someone has to organise them.

Take for example the simple matter of birthdays. Since we all have them and for the most part on a fairly regular annual basis, you'd think it would be a reasonably straightforward matter to organise a team approach. Well, if you're in a dental team you're probably already nodding your head in disbelief that anyone could be so naïve. Straightforward is the last thing they are. Whose job is it to keep track of the relevant dates? Who organises the collection and who's responsible for getting the card?

Does the practice petty cash pay for the cakes, or does the person whose birthday it is? Should you encourage between-meal snacks of sugary carbohydrates anyway?

And this is before you've even approached the thorny question of the collection. How much everyone puts in is often a matter for a representatively formed working-party-sub-group in itself. Should it be a fixed amount, a pay-what-you-think sum or a sliding scale depending on your income? Does seniority count, (assuming the person lets on their age!), do you have to take into consideration such factors as popularity, do they really need another propelling pencil and personalised ruler desk set anyway?

How to actually mark the occasion is another whole set to. The trouble with team celebrations is that invariably everyone has a slightly different idea as to how they should happen or be conducted. Or, rather, the majority of people have an agreed idea, while a smaller but nonetheless significant number have quite another idea and an even smaller number, usually one, has completely the opposite idea. For example, you settle on cakes as the (more-or-less-majority) way to say 'Happy Birthday' - the exception being the vegetarian, the person on a diet, the animal rights supporter who doesn't eat cream or the conspiracy theorist who believes that being seen celebrating puts them immediately on the CIA database - but then run into trouble as to when to have them.

Not all members of the team are in the practice every day of the week, so who misses out? You can try and do it on a rota basis but that almost needs a part-time member of staff with advanced computer skills to work it out, which only further confuses matters as she or he won't be there all the time either. Then there's the question of when in the day. Morning coffee break (usually the time set aside for Surgery 1 to see emergencies) early lunchtime (not everyone finishes promptly) mid-lunchtime (when are we supposed to get to the bank for goodness sake?) late lunchtime (some people start the pm session sooner), afternoon tea (remember, Margaret leaves by 2.45) home time (yeah, right!)

I suppose the easiest route would be to have a clause put into employment contracts to the effect that 'In acknowledging the inevitable occurrence of birthdays SmileMore™ dental practice, while not wishing to seem miserable, finds it better for all concerned if it does not encourage their celebration.' But then who in their right mind would want to work in a team like that?

OK, so whose happy day is next? I got the card last time and did the collection and bought the pencil and ruler set, so it's someone else's turn... Many happy (team) returns!