

These pages offer you the chance to open topics for debate, discuss the latest issues, or even offer advice to fellow readers. One letter in this issue offers PCDs a way into a full dental degree programme. Send us your views on this or anything to do with working in the dental profession. We look forward to hearing from you.

★ Star Letter

The future is BRIGHT

I am delighted to inform all your readers they should look out for the new CD-ROM-based learning programme, DNART (Dental Nurse Access to Registration Training), which will be delivered to all dental practices in September (see page 23). It is a top-up training programme designed to enable all dental nurses who have the equivalent of two years full-time chair-side experience to get on to the new GDC Register for PCDs when it opens next year. A tutor version will also be available.

But what is the future for dental nurses and indeed for all PCD education and development? The NVQ is being reviewed right now as it is accepted that it is too cumbersome and paper intensive – look out for the new structure next year, and let us know your thoughts. The National Examining Board for Dental Nurses national exam is a more academic qualification, but it is also looking to re-invent itself next year.

From next year (apart from in the Armed Forces) there will be no standalone dental hygiene course – it will be part of dental therapy training, and moves are afoot to encourage dental hygienists to

undertake top-up training to become dental therapists. Is the role of the dental hygienist about to die?

Training courses are being created and new qualifications devised for Clinical Dental Technicians and for Orthodontic Therapists – two new groups of PCDs who will both be treating patients.

So who will provide the oral hygiene and dietary advice to patients – will we find that the dental therapist is ‘overqualified’ for this role in the new NHS? If we are not training dental hygienists, then perhaps there is room for the dental nurse post-qualification certificates to be further expanded and developed to fulfil this role. Could this new role include polishing teeth and even supra-gingival scaling, leaving the ‘real perio’ to the dental therapist?

And who will pay for all the training for PCDs? Dentistry always seems to be an anomaly, not wholly within the NHS, and with many of its qualifications not in the National Education Framework, so that neither the Department of Health nor the Department for Education and Skills want to pay for them! One of my roles is as lead Postgraduate Dental Dean for PCDs, and the Deaneries are all being encouraged to become involved in CPD (and basic training) for PCDs – but with no identified funding. DNART has been produced by my Deanery on behalf of the Committee of Postgraduate Dental Deans and Directors and funded by the Department of Health, England – but what now?

I congratulate you on an excellent, informative publication and would be very pleased to hear what your readers feel, either directly or through the pages of *Vital*.

Stephen Lambert-Humble

Dean of Postgraduate Dentistry, Kent, Surrey and Sussex

Registration is not useful

We have been dental nursing collectively for more than 60 years and love the job but it would appear we are going to have to hang up our gloves next July. We don't suffer from the delusions of grandeur that seem to be sweeping the profession. We are all qualified, registered, valued and respected in the workplace but at the end of the day we are just dental nurses. Like most of our friends and colleagues we work to live, not live to work. What's next for us – a fancy new job title to make us feel more important?

We have heard all the arguments for registration but at ground

zero do you really think it will make the slightest difference to the average nurse! We are not interested in statutory registration. We object to spending our hard-earned salary on medical certificates and revenue generators. We just want to work!

Perhaps we will seek employment elsewhere, a job where we can still serve the public without having to pay for the privilege and prove we are all healthy, honourable and respected citizens.

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