

day in the life

Handpicked for team triumph



How does a dental practice with six surgeries and 22 staff function smoothly and maintain motivation as a team? **Julie Ferry** spoke to award-winning El-Nashar Dental Care in Devon.

It was a moment the whole team had been waiting for. Dressed in their finest, they had travelled from the practice in Newton Abbot, Devon to the Lancaster Gate Hotel in central London to hear the verdict and now it was in. The prestigious Probe award for the Best Dental Support Team of the year was announced and they had done it – El-Nashar

Dental Care had won.

Speaking to practice manager, Sharon El-Nashar, 48, a few months later it is clear that it was a night she will always remember.

‘The award was the icing on the cake of a brilliant year for the practice,’ she says. ‘We were just so proud of the whole team and pleased that we were all recognised for our work in such a nice way. I think it has taken

each team member up another level of motivation and we are determined to keep up the good work.’

Practice supervisor, Cherry Young, 64, who has been with the practice for seven years, agrees: ‘Receiving a team award means that everyone shared the occasion, however the award also felt like a real personal achievement – it makes you realise that all

the effort you put into your job is worth it.'

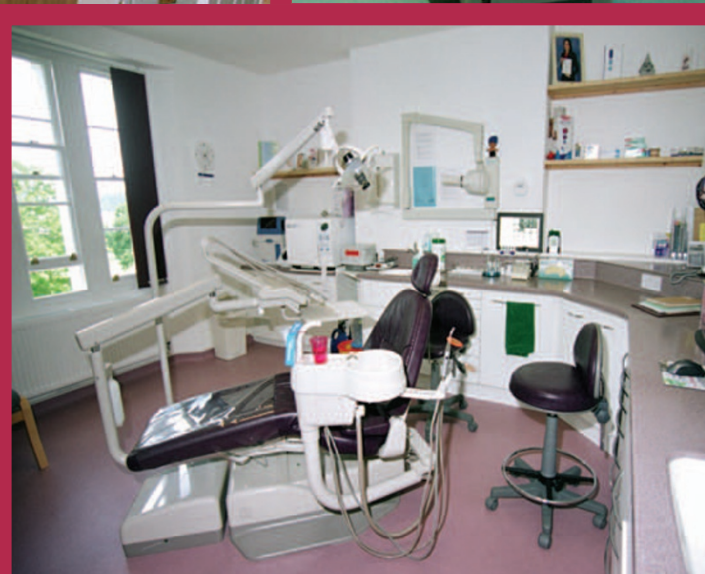
The practice has certainly been through its fair share of changes in the last few years. Sharon and practice principal and husband, Hassan first opened for business nine years ago when they set-up as a single-handed practice, sharing costs with another dentist in the same building. However, it wasn't long before patient demand meant that the couple were looking to expand. First they took on an associate and then a few years later they opened another practice just down the road when the PCT asked them to run some contracts. Therefore, they had three chairs in the new practice while still keeping the two chairs at the cost-sharing practice.

'We ran the business like that for two years,' says Sharon. 'However, pretty quickly we realised that the new practice was becoming such a great success because we had more control over it. We talked it over with the team at one of our team days and the general consensus was that we should find a building where we could all be on one site. After lots of searching we opened a whole new practice in May this year. We now have one big practice with six surgeries and 22 staff.'

Such rapid expansion was bound to have an effect on team members, but as the award reveals, the transition from small to big team was handled smoothly by all involved. One of the reasons for this may have been Sharon's business background. When the practice was first established Sharon ran her own

and so she eventually gave up her own business.

'I love being a practice manager and the best thing about it is that all of the skills I have learnt through working with other organisations I have been able to use here. Helpfully, management communications is a pretty generic



subject, so it can be applied to lots of different businesses. Also, because I don't come from a dental background I could look at the practice from a totally different perspective, which has been very beneficial.'

When asked what she thinks makes the dental team at EL-Nashar so special, Sharon doesn't hesitate. 'Communication,' she says. 'There is a lot of respect for the dentists here

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management training business and was only on practice manager duties during the evenings and weekends. However, as the practice grew it became clear that she would have to take on more of a role in the practice's affairs

but the rest of the dental team aren't afraid to talk to them and give constant feedback. Every month we have a breakfast staff meeting from 8.30-10am where we have cookies and croissants and talk over any

issues affecting the practice. We also have three team days a year and every November we have our main team day where we sit down and write the business objectives for the next 12 months. Suggestions last year included getting more involved with recycling at the practice, doing charity events like a sponsored walk – which we are doing next week – and a reward scheme for children if they come in for two check-ups in a row and don't need anything done. These are the softer business objectives running alongside the harder business objectives like marketing – mix them together and they all work really well.'

Cherry Young, who has worked in dentistry since she was 18, likes the fact that her ideas are listened to at the practice and

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believes that is one of the reasons why the team works so well.

‘We all come up with ideas and although not everything is taken on board, it is always discussed and if it can’t be implemented we are always given a reason why. I am well past retirement age but I would really hate not to be working here – basically I’m here until they kick me out.’

Sharon admits that she treats her team like an extended family and that in some cases this approach has not been welcomed by a handful of DCPs.

‘Virtually everybody here has been hand-picked to work as part of the team,’ she says. ‘There have been people that have come here over the years and haven’t liked the closeness of it but they have then left of their own accord. Everyone who is here now is really committed to the practice.’

Lesley Anthony, 52, has been an associate dentist at the practice for just over a year after a career spent in the salaried services. She feels the environment at the practice has had a positive effect on her.

‘We all feel part of a team and are always involved in making decisions. Sharon and Hassan care about their staff and want us to be happy and part of the decision-making process. Consequently, you feel valued as a professional.’

So what is next for the El-Nashar dental team?

‘We want to consolidate what we have achieved in the past few years,’ says Sharon. ‘Our aim is for people to say “wow” to the building,



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“wow” to our staff and “wow” to our clinical standards. We are setting up lots of clinical audits, have just done the BDA’s good practice scheme and we are constantly reviewing our patient care. I must admit I’m an ideas person and I’m not always good at following them up. Luckily I have a great team behind me.’