



Recognition for all

For these reasons, the contribution of both receptionists and practice managers should be appropriately recognised not only with respect to their primary training but also to their ongoing continuing professional development (CPD).

The demise of the British Association of Dental Receptionists in 2007 (*Vital* winter 2006 page 9) seems to indicate either a lack of recognition of the dental receptionist's role within the dental team or a failure to appreciate their unique skills. The successful management of a modern practice, whether private or NHS, is fundamental to the provi-

sion of effective dental health care. Never has this been more relevant than following the introduction of local purchasing and the new General Dental Services (GDS) contract. Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) require all practices to provide an increasing amount of paperwork and statistics to show audit trails for both clinical and non-clinical activities. Most dental principals will delegate these responsibilities to practice managers and for many this will require the learning of new skills. Clearly defined career pathways need to be developed for both receptionists and practice managers. Many of the training programmes currently available are largely generic and fail to acknowledge the unique requirements of dental practice and how the non-clinical administrative aspects need to dovetail with the clinical environment. This can have a strongly de-motivating influence on attracting the right people into the profession.

Efficient use of time

In 2007/8, 20,815 dentists had NHS activity recorded via FP17 claim forms and 27 million patients had seen an NHS dentist in the 24 month period ending 31 March 2008.¹ Add to this the ever increasing number of dental practices operating solely in the private sector and it can be seen how great the need is to provide

adequate and effective administrative support at practice level. The pathway for recruitment of receptionists and practice managers is very often from dental nurses who initially undertake a part-time reception role

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progressing to full-time receptionist and then to practice manager with many of the additional skills necessary being acquired either by bitter experience or by improvisation: this can often result in an inefficient use of both clinical and non-clinical time, or patient dissatisfaction, or both. Is it not time that receptionist and practice manager training is linked to that of the whole dental team so that there is mutual respect and understanding for the roles and contribution that each individual member makes?

world of fast developing technology and the complexity of constantly evolving regulations such as health and safety, data protection, and disability legislation, it is essential that every dental team member is fully informed and up-to-date. Personal development plans (PDPs) as a mechanism by which educational needs are prioritised together with a commitment to address them have long been a part of a dentist's CPD; these need to be developed and structured with the same degree of commitment for the non-clinical dental team

specifically at the non-clinical members of the dental team. These are currently provided as part of the activities of the British Dental Practice Managers' Association (www.bdpma.org.uk) with seminars and an excellent quarterly magazine, *Dental Management* (formerly *Networking*). However, the lack of a national association for dental receptionists fails to provide a focus for such important ongoing development. This deficiency in training, support, and CPD development needs to be addressed as a matter of some urgency

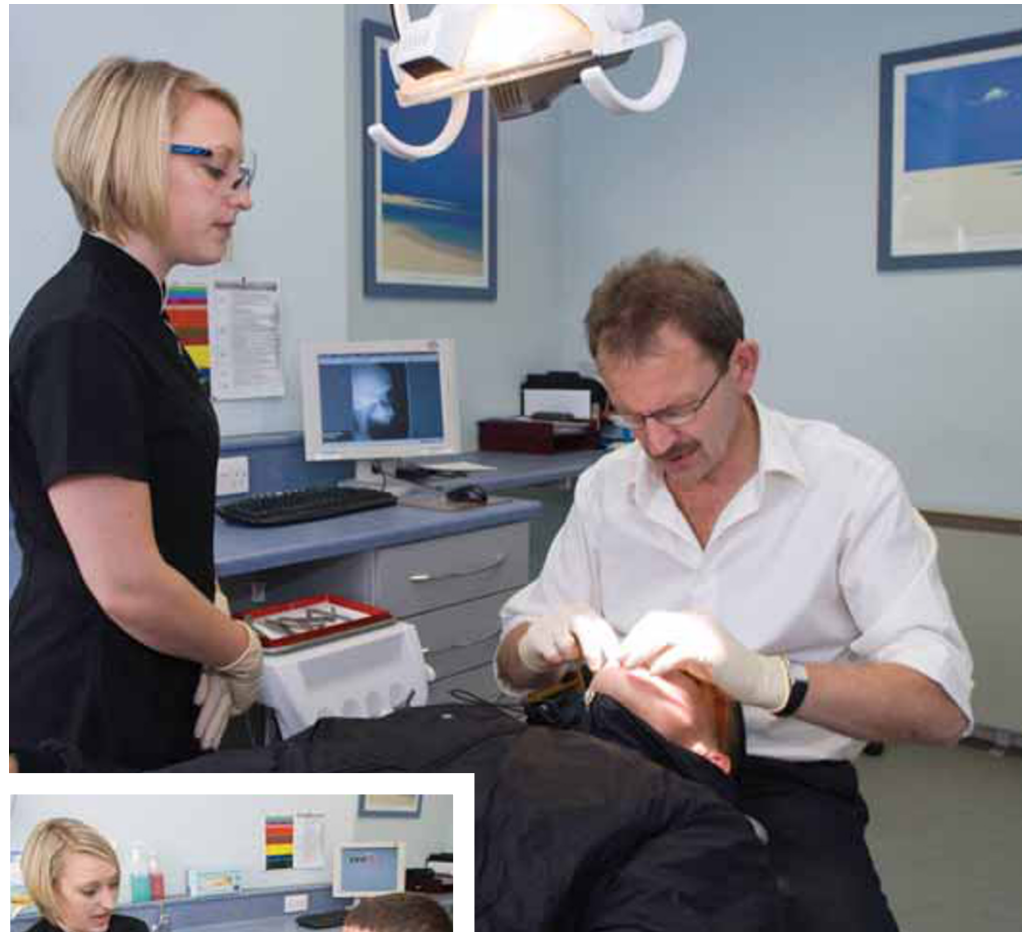
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Primary training

Opportunities exist for colleges and universities to provide primary training programmes, locally delivered and combined with work-place activity that could lead to professionally recognised qualifications at certificate or diploma level. These could be delivered in conjunction with aspects of the dental nurse, hygienist, therapist and orthodontic therapist courses where there are common core subjects such as communication skills, patient management, and health and safety. An established career pathway recognised by the profession would allow progression from the non-clinical to clinical pathways and vice versa with the potential for the acceptance of accredited prior learning to make this transition more acceptable and efficient.

Personal development plans

Just because CPD is not compulsory for receptionists and practice managers, it doesn't mean that it's not important. On the contrary, in a



members so that they meet the needs of both the individual and the practice.

Valuing the whole team

Setting learning objectives is not an academic exercise but should clearly define the outcomes of the learning process and form the core structure of any ongoing PDP. This involves the delivery of post qualification courses and integrated educational programmes targeted

if the profession is to continue to recruit and retain such important and valued members of the dental team.

1. NHS Information Centre. NHS Dental Statistics, 2007/08 annual report.

Look out for an article on personal development plans (PDPs) in the spring 2009 issue of Vital.

Images from left to right, top to bottom: left-hand page – Education for the whole team; giving information to telephone enquirers. Right-hand page – Clinical teamwork; patient education