A new class

Access to care has long been a problem in orthodontics but with the creation of a new class of PCD this is set to change, reports **Kate Craig**.

When the GDC opens its doors to the entire clinical team in early 2005 a new career path will open up for orthodontic dental nurses and other registered PCDs.

The introduction of the 'orthodontic therapist' category of PCD should help improve access to orthodontics whilst providing career development opportunities for orthodontic nurses looking to take on extra responsibility.

Alex Moss, a member of the GDC's curriculum working party for orthodontic therapists and Head Dental Nurse at the Eastman Dental Hospital's Orthodontic Department, says the need for increased manpower levels and a desire for career development came together to develop the orthodontic therapist as a new class of PCD.

'The basic reasoning behind the development of the new class of PCD was to improve the provision of care for orthodontic patients,' says Alex. 'Access to care has long been a problem because of a manpower shortage in ortho-

odontics. This has led to long waiting lists in many areas.

'There was also no clearly defined career development pathway for dental nurses in orthodontics. Whilst operative PCDs existed in the form of hygienists and dental therapists, there were no opportunities in orthodontics.

'The introduction of orthodontic therapists should improve access to orthodontic care by increasing the availability and size of specialist dental teams, led by a dentist with appropriate orthodontic training and skills, and supported by one or more orthodontic therapists.'

In the GDC document *Developing the Dental Team: Curricula Frameworks for Registrable Qualifications for Professionals Complementary to Dentistry* it is recommended that orthodontic therapy students should normally be selected from registered dental nurses, hygienists, therapists and technicians.

Clinical duties of orthodontic therapists will include fixed appliance placement, fixed

appliance removal, removable appliance replacement, clinical record taking and orthodontic emergency care. (See box for details.)

Practising as an orthodontic therapist will remain illegal until parliamentary approval is given to establish the new class of PCD. Richard Clifford, PCD Education Policy Officer to the GDC, says such approval should almost certainly be given by Spring 2005.

Registrable qualifications for orthodontic therapists are yet to be decided, says Richard. 'This is at the earliest stage for orthodontic therapists, but we do expect providers to come forward in 2004 and a training route needs to be in place by the time the register opens in early 2005.'

As orthodontic therapy is a new class of PCD the grandparenting route onto the register will not be an option, but there will be a route to registration for experienced EEA and overseas orthodontic therapists.

Clinical duties

Clinical duties of orthodontic therapists will include:

Fixed appliance placement

- ♦ placing and removing orthodontic separators;
- ♦ identifying and selecting orthodontic bands appropriate for the patient;
- ♦ placing, adapting and cementing bands to achieve an ideal fit;
- ♦ identifying attachments appropriate for individual teeth;
- ♦ cleaning and preparing the tooth surface for orthodontic bonding;
- ♦ using orthodontic adhesives and cements;
- ♦ placing attachments, including bonded retainers, onto the teeth in the correct position;
- ♦ preparing archwires;
- ♦ inserting and ligating archwires and archwire auxiliaries;
- ♦ ligating groups of teeth together;

- ♦ familiarity with the technique of welding attachments to bands.

Fixed appliance removal

- ♦ releasing and removing ligatures;
- ♦ removing archwires and archwire auxiliaries;
- ♦ removing cemented and bonded attachments;
- ♦ differentiating between dental tissues, dental deposits, adhesive and cement;
- ♦ removing orthodontic adhesive and cement residues from the teeth;
- ♦ supragingival cleaning and polishing of the teeth using both powered and manual instrumentation, and at stain removal and prophylaxis where directly relevant to orthodontic treatment.

Removable appliance placement

- ♦ inserting passive removable appliances;
- ♦ inserting active removable appliances

previously adjusted by a dentist;

- ♦ fitting orthodontic headgear;
- ♦ fitting orthodontic facebows which have been previously adjusted by a dentist;
- ♦ measuring elastic headgear forces.

Clinical records

- ♦ taking intraoral and extraoral photographs of patients, and photographs of models and radiographs;
- ♦ taking dental impressions;
- ♦ taking and checking occlusal records, including gnathological facebow readings;
- ♦ casting, basing and trimming orthodontic models;
- ♦ producing a cephalometric analysis of a skull radiograph by contemporary methods.