Time for change?

Now’s a good time to make sure your practice and its team are prepared should difficult times continue into 2010. Mhari Coxon offers some ideas

I went to visit Tate Modern recently and walked into Mirosław Bałka’s dark hole piece. It is a large metal structure lined with black velvet, making it almost impossible to see once you get inside. On walking towards it I felt slightly apprehensive, a need to slow down and watch my footing. Although I couldn’t see in front of me I was determined to reach the end. When I did finally touch the wall at the end, I turned and saw that it was not so dark looking out. It was interesting to watch the caution of those walking in from my vantage position.

I am trying to use the impression this piece of art has left on me, to see a way out of this dark year. If the media and those in the know (who are they by the way?) are to be believed then the worst of the downturn in the market is over and the recession has bottomed out. Although history tells us it might take a good few years more for this country to get back on track.

2009 in dentistry

Over 15 per cent of the UK public have cancelled a dental appointment due to cost, says a new study by Saga Health Cash Plan. Routine healthcare is becoming a victim of the current economic climate, with over a quarter (27 per cent) of Brits cancelling fee-based appointments.

If you and your practices have been fortunate, this year may have seen a slowdown on cosmetic cases, but otherwise things have remained stable.

I am grateful that, five years in, my practice has a large list of patients who appreciate the need for maintenance as part of their oral health hygiene routine. This has been subsidised by a flow, but not a flood, of new patients.

Time to plan

Now that we are turning back to look at the light, I can’t help feeling we still have a tough year or two ahead. I think we can see the change, but it does not mean that 2010 will see the rapid recovery we all desire. Many who have been scraping by this year may fall when the recovery is not as quick as they had hoped.

And so, we as a practice are looking at ways to keep our turnover increasing in the coming months. As part of our plan we have already utilised Kimberley as our oral health adviser, an infection control compliance consultant, a victim of the current economic climate, with over a quarter (27 per cent) of Brits cancelling fee-based appointments.

The positive is that this is the perfect time to build a plan for each staff member, listing some targets they would like to achieve – team targets can be a good way to get us all working together.

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The latter makes bleaching an option becomes. Team building doesn’t have to be expensive; taking time each day to meet and listen to each other is not a waste of time or money and is a simple way of building the respect.

Cementing your team

Team building can help to unite everyone in difficult times and can become a practice builder in its own right as most patients enjoy a friendly, supportive atmosphere that is based on respect.

The more we can work as a close team, the more flawed and smooth the patient experience becomes. Team building doesn’t have to be expensive; taking time each day to meet and listen to each other is not a waste of time or money and is a simple way of building the respect.

For those who fancy challenging themselves and their team, try somewhere like teambuildevents.co.uk which has lots of options you can choose from to help reduce your weaknesses as a team.

Make the change

Whatever changes you decide to implement in practice, remember that the team is working hard to keep things going in this difficult time and should be recognised for this. It is too easy to find fault when things are not how you would like them to be. Lead by example.

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Speculate to accumulate

Although all the things I have mentioned are ways of improving the practice without cost, the reality is you get what you pay for. Sometimes an injection of new ideas and being open to someone else’s experience is all you need to get the growth of the practice back on track. In recent years, the number of dental-related advisors has increased.

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