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 Miroslaw Balka’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 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 fees-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 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 maintenance as part of their oral hygiene routine. This has been subsidised by a flow, but not a flood, of new patients.

Their proven track records with successful practices encourage others to take the step to change. They do come with a price tag which some may balk at. But they would not still be here if their programmes, books and advice did not succeed. A cost-effective way of dipping a toe in the water is to attend a one-day seminar as a group.

Infection control compliance

Now could be the time to build the business plan and make a time-line for the practice to comply. Many companies have highly educated colleagues working with them to support the change in practice. Carmel McInnes, working with Opident is a perfect example, having worked closely with Mike Martin and Martin Fulford.

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 flawless 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 money and is a simple way of building the respect.

For those who fancy challenging themselves and their team, try somewhere like teambuildsevents.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 we would like them to be. Lead by example.

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.

‘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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