Dates to remember
There’s no better time than the new year to implement change, says Sharon Holmes

Seeing as the financial market is still depressed financially and patients aren’t keen to part with their hard-earned cash, the Dental Arts Studio has been developing a marketing campaign. Each month there has been a deadline to meet and a panic to get our marketing material ready to meet print deadlines.

A lesson learned
Out of this panic, and as a New Year’s resolution, I have decided to be proactive. To avoid this mad panic, I’ve devised a special events calendar, as a way of staying on top of these deadlines throughout the year. It reminds my practice managers to prepare the marketing material two months in advance, to allow time for adjustments and for the ordering and printing of the adverts or leaflets. In doing this, it avoids disappointment for the patients and also stops them from thinking that we are inexperienced and unprepared.

The second calendar is in relation to clinical governance. Seeing as I manage a mini-corporate group, it is very difficult to monitor whether all essential documentation is on record for each member of staff, so it helps me to keep tabs on what we have and are missing. I have now made the decision to carry out an audit across the group twice a year due to the staff changes that take place from time to time and due to this paperwork is often overlooked which can lead to legal implications due to negligence.

Meeting patients’ needs
The third task that I have set is aiming to meet the needs and desires of our patients. I have completed a patient survey throughout the group in relation to patient care and services. I will use the data to devise a better service. The forms show that patients are uneducated when it comes to oral health, many stating that visiting the oral hygienist was not important or the health of their gums.

Yes, I know this is going to entail major in-house training for staff and close monitoring to ensure that they implement what is being taught, but I’m willing to give it a shot. Knowing this has made me more determined to train my staff to better educate our patients, because what the surveys are telling me is that the patients have not been previously educated in relation to the most important aspects of oral care. Where are we failing our patients?

Better education
It is vital that time is taken to discuss dental care with patients. The more we educate them, the better they will respond to treatments, without thinking we are trying to extort money by trying to sell cosmetic dentistry privately. This was another point apparent from the patient survey, that patients did not see it important to have a cosmetically enhanced smile.

However, whatever was very high on the list of importance was, the dentists’ skill, pain control, trust and clarity with knowing the costs prior to the start of treatment which brings me back to the importance of writing up treatment plans that have been discussed openly with the patient prior to starting treatment.

As John D Rockefeller said: “I believe in the dignity of labour, whether with head or hand; that the world owes no man a living but that it owes every man an opportunity to make a living.”

About the author
Sharon Holmes has worked in dental practice management since 1992. Arriving in the UK in 2002, she took a post in a mixed NHS and private practice in Wembley, eventually taking over its management, converting it to a fully private practice. In 2005, she moved to London City Dental Practice where after 18 months, was responsible for managing four practices in the group. The London City Dental Practice is a part of a mini-corporate group called the Dental Arts Studio, to which she has been instrumental in its creation. She holds the position of operations director and manages every aspect of the group alongside her principal dentists.

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