Care Quality Commission
- By Seema Sharma

All NHS and private dentists have to register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in 2011. Simply having a set of policies and procedures in place is not going to impress the authorities. Practices will be expected to demonstrate outcomes to prove that they meet a fairly extensive set of regulations which can be grouped into six broad sections:

1. Patient involvement and information
2. Personalised care, treatment and support
3. Safeguarding and safety
4. Suitability of staffing
5. Quality and management
6. Suitability of management

Do or die
If you've got somewhere to go, this may be the time to book a ticket, but if you own a practice and have to stay and face the music, then there are only two options – to take the bull by the horns and slog through getting compliance systems in place grudgingly, or turn the problem into an opportunity and use it to attract and retain patients and develop your practice. Doing nothing is not an option. Non-compliant practices face being shut down, and there is a lot to do for CQC compliance between now and next April.

Demonstrating Quality
We all have an inherent understanding of the difference between a good quality and a poor quality service, but imagine being offered a once in a lifetime year long holiday on a Caribbean island, or a couple of weeks in a Mumbai slum which was the only travel invitation I've received recently.

What information would you want your team to gather and send to you, so you can be reassured that all your patients will still be returning, the practice will meet CQC regulations and, if you have an NHS contract, your commissioner will still be talking to you when you return?

Management ecosystems
Do not be daunted by the new buzz phrases in dentistry – quality and key performance indicators. To the entrepreneurial practice owner and manager, they provide an opportunity to build a set of integrated clinical and financial practice management systems which prove that they run a high quality practice, and to market their pioneering activities for growth.

As a successful practice grows, there comes a point where every dental practice owner finds the balance of growth and a personalised service difficult to maintain. At this stage one of three things usually happens:

- Clinicians who prefer clinical dentistry to practice management choose to run boutique or niche practices, concentrating on specialist care or a smaller segment of the more affluent population.
- Others step up from being a manager to a leader and empower other team members to take on some of the services that contributed to the original growth, putting appropriate checks and balances in place to ensure that quality does not slip.
- Some do neither and try to fit management in a piecemeal fashion around clinical work, which can lead to stress and disenchantment.

Eleven Entrepreneurial Tips
1. Measure qualitatively
   Put some qualitative measures in place as soon as you can eg start using a comments book and a patient satisfaction survey. Patient experience is a key CQC quality measure but it also keeps you informed about your practice's day-to-day activities and keeps your team actively engaged in delivering outstanding customer care.

2. Meet
   Team meetings serve multiple purposes. By brainstorming the strengths and weaknesses in your practice, you are likely to find that there are some weaknesses that you had not considered and be pleasantly surprised at how some of your team members have the skills and interest to help you take your work forward during the year.

3. Appraise
   Spend a couple of weeks conducting staff appraisals to develop a baseline assessment of each team member's level of understanding in areas like safety, safeguarding, patient involvement, communication, evidence based preventive strategies and personalised care pathways.

4. Delegate
   Not only is assessment of fitness of workers one of the CQC regulations, you can share out the workload by using the opportunity to get "buy in" from each member of your team to take on an area of responsibility and tailor their personal and professional development to meet associated CQC outcome targets.

5. Motivate
   Define your vision, praise those who are already working towards it and explain the benefits of working as a team to achieve targets by distributing responsibility to those who are not – after all registration is required to stay in business, so it's in everyone's interest to join hands and do their bit.

6. Monitor
   Use standard risk assessments and audits to assess if the practice is meeting regulations, to create improvement plans and to keep an eye on whether your practice is meeting patients' needs and expectations.

7. Measure quantitatively
   We use common quantitative measures every day – we count how many people have attended your practice today.

Seema Sharma, founder of Dentabyte, is a joint shareholder in 4 successful start-up practices which between them have 10 general and 5 preventive & specialist chairs. That may not sound like much but when you factor in she has the time to collect her kids from school, take a holiday at least 4 times a year and run her charity, The Sharma Foundation, it becomes apparent that lifestyle is certainly her yardstick.

Seema says “Successful practice management isn't about the separate components it is about building an eco-system that integrates and optimises those components to the point that they become perpetually self-sustaining.”

Whether you need to get more from your practice management systems, prepare for CQC, meet your PCT's KPIs, balance your practice financials, build more effective teams or continue professional development, Dentabyte can help.

For more information or to reserve your place on our core CPD or CQC courses commencing April 2010, contact us.

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