A sensible alternative
Michael Lansdell offers advice on avoiding involvement with tax schemes

This article is, of course, terrible publicity for the participants. What is more important is the Inland Revenue's position as documented, which is that because the arrangement was principally aimed at tax avoidance, and was not trading on a proper commercial basis, then the participants in the scheme are not entitled to tax benefits, and to the extent that they have had tax benefits, these should be repaid to the Inland Revenue with penalties and interest.

The Mail on Sunday then went on to report that the firm that developed the scheme had problems of its own: a loss of £6.5m for the year to April 2009, and that two of its executives were charged last year in connection with a £219m tax scam for wealthy clients. Not the most tasteful company for a dentist to be keeping.

A more sensible solution
On the one hand, you have taxes skyrocketing and you feel that you must take action. On the other hand, you want to avoid dodgy tax schemes because deep down you know that they will cause you trouble and emotional and financial distress later. Is there an alternative?

Yes. The solution is the incorporation of your dental practice, ie converting from a sole trader or partnership to a limited company, an arrangement which has been allowed by the GDC since 2006.

Some initial points are relevant about what incorporation is NOT:

- A tax scheme
- A tax loop hole
- Illegal
- Will not reduce your tax bill to 0 per cent

If we know what incorporation is NOT, then what IS it?
- It is a mechanism that may significantly reduce your tax bill, usually by between 30 and 50 per cent, depending on individual circumstances.

What about some of the more popular misconceptions about incorporation out there?

- Incorporation takes away your flexibility – on the contrary, the opposite is true.
- There will be loads of extra tax to pay when you sell or retire – this seems very unlikely, and to the extent that it may be true, it should be quantified and compared to the tax that you will save until retirement or sale to work out whether you will be better or worse off overall.
- Your practice gross, staff wages and profits will be a matter of the public record – if your gross annual turnover is less than £8.5 million, this does not apply and your private information about these things remains private.
- Limited companies are subject to inspections from PAYE auditors – in fact, all employers are subject to inspections from PAYE auditors, sole traders, partnerships and limited companies alike – your trading structure makes no difference.
- Your PCT won’t agree to it – many PCTs do and many don’t; if they don’t, there are ways of benefiting from the tax savings without disturbing your arrangements with the PCT.

Conclusion
It is impossible for any professional – accountant or otherwise – to say whether incorporation is a good or bad idea without fully understanding your own circumstances and working out the savings available in your particular circumstances. It may be right for you. The next step is to consult a dental incorporation specialist and see if you can do it yourself, and if you could, by how much.

About the author
Michael Lansdell was brought up in South Africa, receiving his honours degree there in 1981. He completed his training with international accounting firm Grant Thornton in 1984, and went on to become a founding partner at Lansdell & Rose Chartered Accountants (SA) a year later. Based in Kempton Park, Lansdell & Rose deal only on a long-term retained basis, exclusively with owner managed clients, generally dentists and doctors, and specialising in the incorporation of dental practices.
our UDAs, we cash up, we check how many new patients came in and we look at our expenses.

Consider using key performance indicators to attach quantitative measures to qualitative processes. For example:

• How much diary time gets wasted?
• What are the outputs from each clinician in £ or UDAs?
• Which high importance, low fee items (check-ups, reviews, advice, dentures etc.) clog up the appointment book?
• How can this be managed without alienating patients?
• How many high risk/high needs patients are plugged into a “preventive programme” with the hygienist?
• How many low risk patients are on a “maintenance programme” keeping the patients as lifelong supporters and leaving you free to do dentistry?

Not only will you be meeting outcomes around CQC requirements to demonstrate personalised treatment, care and support, you will be freeing up your time to concentrate on treatments and the skilled technical dentistry you spent years in training for, you will ensure you have a tailed partnership with each and every patient which they will tell others about, and you will be picking up those patients who are falling through the net in your practice, and the resultant lost revenue.

8. Plan your strategy
Take a little time out to work out what you are doing well and what needs attention, then create an action plan for the next 12 months.

9. Allocate resource
Decide if you are going to sacrifice clinical time and revenue to work on CQC registration, or if you are going to engage your team and send your practice manager on the right training courses to do the work for you, or a bit of both.

10. Reorganise your finances
Assess where your practice expenditure goes. Broadly speaking, rent rates, utilities and compliance related costs are fixed and almost impossible to trim.

Variable costs are related to activity. As a rule of thumb, materials, lab fees and infection control typically use up 12 per cent of turnover – more and you need to have more control, less and you may not be meeting standards.

Personnel costs and profits are the only areas which allow room for manoeuvre – this is why it is so important to get “buy in” from the team and arrange team training. The only other way is to engage expensive professionals to help you, and there may need to be cut backs in personnel costs to fund this. Beware those who tell you to cut back on staff... you may end up doing a lot more work than if you invest in their training!

11. Stay calm
Most problems have solutions, even if it takes some time to find them. Consider a positive approach and seek assistance if necessary.

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**About the author**

An impassioned advocate of mixed practices, Seema is a successful dentist who owns 4 practices, including a 6-chair multi-disciplinary centre in the heart of Docklands, and a practice management consultancy, Dentalbyte Ltd. Attributing her success to sound management and investment strategies, she recently visited the slums of Mumbai to give away £50,000 to underprivileged communities living in absolute poverty, and established a philanthropic charity, The Sharma Foundation.

If you would like to know more about her humanitarian efforts, email info@seemasharma.co.uk.

For practice management and CQC support email info@dentalbyte.co.uk Website: Dentalbyte.co.uk.

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