I am a strong advocate of nurses taking on new duties, as this can contribute to the progressive future of a dental practice. When nurses feel they are valued and have had time invested in their career progression, they are more likely to remain loyal to the practice. If your practice supports its nurses carrying out wider duties, it is unlikely they will move to another practice that offers fewer responsibilities. If the nurse has the responsibility of carrying out these tasks, she/he will spend more time with the patients who will feel more cared for, which in turn will lead to more word-of-mouth referrals.

Testing the water

I have been involved in a pilot study for the Dental Nurse Education & Training Centre at King’s College Hospital where we have trained nurses to take alginate impressions. I routinely take study model impressions for most patients, but by passing this across to my nurse, my time is free for further fee-generating work. More courses are to be launched in early 2009, all of which will be great ways for nurses to become more involved. I often run two rooms; in addition to my treatment room, I run a second one where nurses can discuss treatment plans, review my instructions and use their extra duties. I have found this to be a very effective model. I have also discovered that many patients actually prefer this type of system, as they may otherwise feel rushed if the dentists are carrying out all of these tasks.

Across the pond

In the US, different states allow nurses to carry out a wide variety of extra duties. When this is combined with a hygienist/therapist, an organised dentist can concentrate on more complex dentistry. The rest of the dental team can become more involved in what has traditionally been the remit of the dentist. The UK appears to be slowly moving in this direction, as well, which I believe dentists should welcome, as it is of benefit to the dentist, the dental team and the patients.

Marie Parker is the head of Dental Nurse Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at the Dental Nurse Education & Training Centre in the Kings Dental Institute. She is incredibly passionate about producing and delivering affordable training courses for dental nurses so they are able to improve their current skills. At the moment, the extended duties courses are in their early stages and will be launched in January 2009. The courses available to nurses will include Impression Taking and Fluoride Application and later in the year nurses will have the opportunity to attend courses on Rubberdam and Clinical Photography.

There has already been a large number of enquiries about the courses, and when contacted, the Institute is happy to give out more information and the dates of the courses. Marie believes these courses will be of great importance to all dental nurses looking to further their career. ‘It will have a positive impact on nurses, increasing their skills and providing more job satisfaction. It will enhance their prospects and pay.’

For further information please email Justin Stewart at enquiries@thedentureclinic.co.uk. For more information about the courses please contact Marie Parker 020 3299 9000 ext: 2914 or marie.parker@nhs.net.

About the author

Justin Stewart was the first qualified Biofunctional Prosthetic System (BPS) dentist in the UK. He is a member of the American Prosthetic Society and the British Society for the Study of Prosthetic Dentistry. Dr Stewart has recently been appointed to Dr Joe Massad’s International Advisory Board. An experienced lecturer, Dr Stewart is dedicated to resolving denture related problems through teaching and training.