some time back in July 2007, the Dental Arts Studio's Clapham Junction branch suffered a blow during one of the summer storms. It was Friday morning, and I was at our other practice in City Road with practice owners Dr Malhan and Dr Solanki, when I received a phone call from Clapham Junction's receptionist. 'Hello Sharon. We're stuck in the building and the practice is filling up with water!' I thought the worst. If they were stuck, the flooding had to be bad. But as it turned out, the staff couldn’t get out because it was raining outside, and they had nowhere to go. I wasn’t sure whether I should laugh or cry! ‘You can either get wet in the rain or drown, the choice is yours!’ I replied.

Picking up the pieces
And so the long and winding road to rebuilding our crushed practice began. First we had to get the insurance assessors in. This was a slow process, seeing as so many other buildings had been damaged in the recent floods all across England. Your best option here is to hire an independent assessor who will work in your best interest, when it comes to dealing with your insurance company.

My first task on the Monday morning was to get my nurses to pack all dental instruments into containers for safe storage. This was not an easy task. All the staff wanted to go home on full pay, as they didn’t feel it was their problem that the practice wasn’t functional.

I called the HSE and told them what had happened. I also explained to them what I needed to do to start the clean-up process. As it was rainwater, it would be safe for the staff to remain in the building, so long as they wore barrier clothing – gloves, aprons and protective eyewear. Their day clothes were to be sent to the dry cleaners and they were not to eat food on the premises. I carried out all of the above instructions as informed.

A formal complaint
Despite my vigilance, one member of staff contacted the HSE officer to report me for putting their health at risk. Luckily, the complaint came to nothing, as I had followed the correct procedure.

In the days to follow, trying to stay positive and focused, knowing all the staff were unhappy, was emotionally draining. After the professional cleaners came in and removed all the contaminated dental materials, they placed extractor fans downstairs in the basement surgeries to dry the floors, walls and ceilings. This also helped to remove the terrible damp smell.

All the damaged patients’ archived records had to be sent to a professional restoring company, as records less than eleven years old could not legally be destroyed.

Home and dry?
The practice was now clear of water, but a strong stench of damp lingered, which would dissipate as the day wore on with doors and windows left open. I was also at the practice all day, which the nurses aren’t used to and found difficult, especially as they call me ‘the whip’, something I found out recently. The Old Street practice manager was away on holiday when this happened, and I soon realised the staff were lazy and unmotivated so I was constantly motivating them to get anything done. After two weeks, the practice manager

Practice under construction
Flooding, staff and patient complaints and a clean-up operation are enough to put any practice manager to the test. Sharon Holmes triumphs in the face of adversity

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