A journey to accreditation

Dental Tribune talks to dentists taking part in a new accreditation scheme launched by the Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust

The Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust has launched a new accreditation scheme for dentists. The Dental Practice Accreditation Scheme (DPAS) aims to help dental practices achieve best practice and accredit quality assurance. The scheme is complementary to the British Dental Association (BDA) Good Practice Scheme.

The scheme focuses on how dental practices can improve levels of customer care and advice for their patients, above and beyond the core service that dental practices are contracted to provide.

There are around 500,000 people living in the Heart of Birmingham area, which covers some of the city's poorest neighbourhoods as well as the wealthier shopping and business districts in the centre of Birmingham. The wards covered by the Primary Care Trust are Oscott, Perry Barr, Handswood Wood, Lozells and East Handsworth, Aston, Nechells, Selly, Ladywood, Sparkbrook and Springfield.

Meeting healthcare needs

Seven out of 10 of the people in the area are black or Asian and the Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust aims to meet the challenges of fulfilling the healthcare needs of the diverse population they serve. As the population served by dentists in the area is diverse, there is a need to match the range of skills and approaches to address the needs of the local community. The new scheme is a collaborative approach to transferring skills and ideas, which fits well into this context.

Six dental practices have been selected to take part in the first phase of the scheme. Dentists from two of the pilot practices were interviewed by the Dental Tribune and discuss the challenges they face and what they hope to achieve from being a pilot practice on the scheme.

Busy city practice

Sudhivinder Attri runs the Hillbrook Dental Health Centre in Ladywood Road in the Balsall Heath area of Birmingham – a busy thru-road with links to the city centre and many other parts of Birmingham. The health centre has over 6,000 patients and provides treatment that includes domiciliary, orthodontic and sedation services. Their income is entirely derived from the NHS, as 98.3 per cent of patients are exempt from payment. The centre is also treating an increasing number of asylum seekers.

Sudhivinder says, ‘Our books are full with casual patients who just want one course of treatment and are not concerned with sustaining their oral health. We need to target these people with oral health promotion and prevention advice. We have already given oral health products – samples of tooth brushes and toothpastes with information leaflets to local school children.’

Focus on quality

Achieving quality management in terms of how dental practices operate is the main objective of the scheme. The pilot dental practices will also need to demonstrate how they are engaging with their patients to improve dental care in order to reach accreditation status.

The scheme is carefully structured and requires each dental practice to take part in a range of activities including a SWOT analysis of the practice, a record keeping audit, a review of training and career development for the practice team, significant event analysis, case studies and health promotion activities to demonstrate how the dental practice is operating and how it’s promoting good general health within the community it serves. A review of evidence and a presentation before peers will also take place before the pilot dental practices can receive accreditation status.

Communication is key

Sandeep Kumar (far left) and Sudhivinder Attri (far right) with Neil Lockwood (far left)

Sandeep Kumar runs the Birchfield Dental Practice in Perry Barr. His team of 20 run five practices, treating 18,000 mainly NHS patients. The major scheme priority is the diversity of the Asian community in the area do not speak English and the Practice’s main challenge is ensuring patients understand the importance of good oral hygiene and maintaining their overall health. Encouraging patients to visit their dentist regularly to avoid problems with their teeth and mouth, however, is proving difficult.

Sandeep says, ‘We want to be an accredited practice to ensure that our patients are aware that we are providing a good quality service. We also want to be recognised as a practice that improves quality of life for our staff and patients. The financial benefits associated with the scheme will help improve services within the practice. In addition to this, we want the scheme to contribute to improving the working life of the team, so that they can be proud of their profession.’

Addressing important issues

Neil Lockwood, projectdirector for DPAS about why he wanted to get involved. He says, ‘The NHS has always tried to walk the tightrope between encouraging efficiency and focusing on consistent quality improvement. Having returned to the NHS (as a chairman) after a gap of a few years from retiring (as a Health Authority chief executive), I noticed how little the agenda had changed, particularly with regard to the question of constantly moving towards best practice.

‘I was personally speculating that the NHS tended to under-invest in support for this type of activity when the opportunity to be involved was put to me. It was clear that the scheme aimed to address some of the issues that I had been thinking about.

Trial and error

Initially, the new accreditation scheme is expected to run for 12 months. However, there is huge interest among dental practices and a possibility that the scheme could be rolled out throughout the Heart of Birmingham area. The other two PCTs in Birmingham are watching the scheme in the hope of following suit.

‘The greatest achievement would be for the scheme to be sustained over a long-term period, allowing the participants to work together to continue to improve until all practices are accredited. This will ensure that the local community in the Heart of Birmingham have access to a range of high quality dental practices,’ says Neil.