Motivating the motivator
Keeping up enthusiasm in a job can be hard sometimes, but we still need to offer a quality level of care no matter what. Mhari Coxon offers some ideas to help you stay motivated

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his last month the clinic has been busy. I’m not complaining – what with the credit crunch in full flow, I’m happy that people are still coming for treatment. My colleague has also just left, and now I’m the only hygienist in my practice, and am well aware of the appointment book filling up weeks in advance. To top it all off, my personal life is busy too.

When life is busy like this, it is easy to get a little lax and decide to skip some things to keep on time and make life easier. We can get tired and de-motivated just like everyone else. After all, we need motivation as well as providing it.

Under pressure
This week, a client was my motivator. She had an aggressive periodontal condition and it took several sessions of root surface debridement and a lot of good hygiene to get her stabilised. When she first attended, as is common with active periodontal cases, she was suffering from a strong oral malodour. She had not mentioned it in her initial interview, and, as she was already motivated to improve her oral health, I chose not to mention it. In this incidence, it was not necessary to use it as leverage.

This visit was for her maintenance appointment and was booked on a particularly busy afternoon and she was my last client of the day. I had just seen three demanding patients in a row, which had left me a little drained and I was conscious of running late.

I carried out the usual run through of the medical history, dental health, stress levels, oral hygiene routine and was seriously considering skipping a bleeding score and not disclosing for a plaque score to make my life easier.

An unexpected boost
Then my patient said that she just wanted to thank me for everything. She was so pleased that I had helped her to stabilise her disease, but was most pleased that the bad breath had gone. She and her friends had been aware of the smell and it had affected her social life quite badly. She had stopped going on dates and avoided large groups where she would need to be close to someone to be heard. She was a receptionist in a large office and she felt self-conscious most days.

Since our completion of initial treatment, she has been speed dating, has joined a dating agency and is enjoying her social life again. She felt this was largely due to the treatment I had carried out and she just wanted to let me know what a difference I had made in her life.

I went from being a shrivelled husk of a hygienist rushing to get home, to bursting with energy and enthusiasm. I may even have had a wee tear in my eye. Needless to say I did do that bleeding and plaque score and she was doing well.

Realistically, most clients are busy and although they appreciate what we do, they might not have the time or the notion to boost our motivation by saying thank you.

Maintaining the motivation
One way to help keep your care consistent for your clients is to work out what will be involved in an appointment with you. Will you always disclose? (I would say yes to that). What about pocket charting? Once a year? Anything over 4mm measured each visit? There is no end to the information we can document, but there is an end to the appointment.

In our practice, we use a protocol system so we have a clear guide to how we care for the patients. This helps us to monitor the quality of care we give our patients.

Another tool to help keep yourself motivated might be to join a hygienist discussion group. Try visiting www.hygienist.co.uk, a website set up by hygienists to interact with other peers. It is free to join and can be a great way to discuss your clinical dilemmas or just have a chat. A big advantage is that you can log on at any time of the day and spend five minutes if that is all you have to spare. There are other professional websites available so it is worth a look.

Whatever method you choose, remember that you are human. It’s all right to lack enthusiasm sometimes, but we still need to deliver a quality level of care. That is what makes us professionals – and great ones at that.

Just one thank you a month is enough to keep your enthusiasm burning.

About the author

Mhari Coxon is a dental hygienist practising in Central London. She is chairman of the London British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BS-DHT) regional group and is on the publications committee of its journal, Dental Health. She is also clinical director of CDHforDCP, which provides GDP courses for all DCPs. To contact Mhari, email mhari.coxon@cpdfordcp.co.uk.