Discussing dental nurses

In the third part of this four-part interview, Neel Kothari talks to Susie Sanderson about dental nurses

NK: I wanted to ask about dental nurses. Nurses are amongst the lowest paid of the dental team and they’ve suffered a huge rise in costs – registration fees, compliance with CPD and other rules and regulations. Have they seen good value for money and are these costs fair?

SS: This is one of those circular issues. We know from our research that a significant proportion of practices pay their dental nurses’ regulation costs, and by that I mean not just the GDC fees but also the CPD fees. Now that’s fine, but of course it just gets recycled into the expenses of the practice so the wages bill looks bigger, profitability is challenged and the nursing profession appears to be getting more expensive for practices.

NK: I think that it’s rather sad and in my personal view – and it’s not BDA policy at the moment – I think it was a step too far to require GDC regulation of all dental nurses. That doesn’t apply to the extended duty dental nurses – the dental nurses who have additional qualifications so that they can be more involved directly in patient care. I think the regulation in that situation is justified – not only justified from a patient safety point of view, but I think justified loosely from a career progression point of view as well and for the ability to demonstrate responsibility and be a significant part of the whole dental team.

Fifteen years ago, dentistry was a very paternalistic profession: the dentist decided what they were going to do, issued instructions, people ran round them, made them coffee, put their metaphorical slippers on for them and kept quiet in the surgery. I think that’s rather sad and in my personal view – and it’s not the GDC fees but also the CPD fees. Now that’s fine, but of course it just gets recycled into the expenses of the practice so the wages bill looks bigger, profitability is challenged and the nursing profession appears to be getting more expensive for practices.

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