Mentoring in practice – a rewarding expansion role for team members

Mhari Coxon provides some insight into the art of mentoring

At the time of writing I am working with a wonderful young dental team, helping them to develop their treatment paths for patients, enabling them to offer a wider range of excellent care in a cost effective manner by utilising the existing team members. This will see the dental nurses doing more and more and walking beside each patient, supporting them on their journey through treatment to health and happiness in their care plans. The role will not be purely assisting and co-ordinating the patient, but will have clinical elements which will be revisited throughout the patients treatment and beyond into the patients long term maintenance plan.

The nurses are excited and enthusiastic to be more clinically involved in the patients care and have more personal development in their career path. This new way of working will ease the burden on the hygienists/therapists and allow at least one of them to pursue more of the aesthetic anterior work that she is enjoying developing. The dentist, still the all important centre of this method of working, will also have more freedom to develop and attend courses and improve his enjoyment of his working day.

Sound too good to be true? It is not as unattainable as some might think and I truly believe it will be a big part of future dental care plans. The key element here in building this blended line of care for patients is the empowerment of the team to implement this type of care. And the tutors I am using? I am working with a wonderful and dedicated team of dental nurses, dental hygienists and therapists. This is underused and misunderstood place.

For some, mentoring comes naturally. For others confidence can need a boost. The most important tool in this is communication. It is also essential that the mentor has kept up to date with which ever aspect of practice that they wish to mentor in. By supporting any mentoring with theoretical work, you can often find the mentor learning too! With a positive attitude from all involved, both parties gain in terms of career skills and confidence and the quality of work in practice tends to improve too as everyone is aware of the standard they are aiming for. There is also a personal sense of satisfaction that is gratifying for all involved.

If mentoring is something you might be interested in but you worry you don’t have the right abilities then the Faculty of General Dental Practitioners has a wonderful one year distance learning certificate course, which would give you the tools and the peers to work with to build this skill group into your life. The course is approximately one year long and is mainly distance learning, with only three face to face study days in London. There is a good level of computer literacy needed; otherwise anyone with any qualification related to dentistry can apply. For those looking to develop their career pathway further in the future, the course counts as 50 postgraduate credits.

The cost of the course is reasonable but high to some DCPS relative to their pay scale. This has been considered and there are two 50 per cent price places available to DCPS for the course starting in September. The forward thinking practices I am sure could see how this skill coming into their mix could allow better implementation of new skills in practice and work in developing a strong, confident workforce, who in turn develop a strong, healthy practice. And, if you needed more persuading, once they start the course, if all future development has a clear aim and objective, gives the opportunity to feedback, and is documented; then you have a tidy number of verifiable CPD points for the team too.

For more details on the course visit www.fgdp.org.uk/professionaldevelopment/dentists/mentoring.pdf.