Managing a dental practice

Jane Armitage discusses management qualifications

For several years I have been approached by other practice managers, some new to the profession, some not, some having the qualification and others without little or no academic training. I don’t mind answering any questions they may have and I will share the knowledge I have gained over my 40 years in the profession with anyone. However, what does concern me is how many contacts I have from colleagues who tell me they know very little about the job and in some areas don’t even know where to start.

This I find frightening. How can a manager be expected to lead a team of nurses who are not even enforced to be qualified, or working towards a qualification, having not had any academic training themselves? In these days of governing bodies’ expectations of quality, how can this be allowed to happen?

It is time that we as a profession look at this role and see where it can be improved.

Currently, the estimated figure of qualified practice managers stands at 20 per cent, which is appalling. I’m not saying that you should only lead a practice if you have management qualifications in dentistry, but what I am saying is I feel there should be a tiered level of training that all managers should be enforced to study; specifically if they wish to manage a dental practice.

Legislation

With legislation forever changing, I would imagine that managing a dental practice without any knowledge of dentistry would be quite difficult to come to grips with. Managing a bank is one thing, but managing a dental practice is another thing entirely!

I therefore believe we need a minimum level of compulsory academic training for those involved in the admin side of our profession.

Learning the principles is the basis of a good manager and this will help with the daily running of the practice, whilst helping transform the stress and worrying of “if you’re doing it right?” The manager should be confident that the protocols and procedures they put into place are correct.
I understand that courses are expensive, but surely it’s cost effective knowing that you have a trained qualified manager leading the team and that you can leave the principle to get on with what they have trained for. With training it will surely be a win/win scenario for everyone.

The role of the practice manager

When it comes to defining the role of a practice manager, I believe the answer will be different depending what part of the country you are in.

Sometimes the practice manager is a nurse who one minute will be taking x-rays and the next minute they will be interviewing someone; or it could be a receptionist who is a qualified nurse, but finds themselves in the role of the receptionist, nurse and practice manager! Or maybe it’s a qualified manager with training in management but not specific to dentistry? Last but not least, maybe the practice manager is one of the 20 per cent of qualified dental practice managers within the UK.

I really feel for the many individuals out there who are struggling whilst trying to pretend they know exactly what is required, when really they need to be in the position that if the CQC do make a visit they won’t need to bother the principal to make sure everything is in place.

Please don’t think that I am underestimating many of my colleague’s ability to manage a dental practice; what I am asking for is formal training that leads to a qualification covering all aspects of managing a dental practice; it really should be something that is looked at to ensure everyone with the title ‘practice manager’ has had the correct foundation training. Because how can you expect qualified nurses who have been enforced to maintain CPD to take instructions from a manager who does not have to possess any formal qualification and who doesn’t even have to do CPD to maintain their role?

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Should there be a certain level of training that managers should be forced to study?

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About the author

Jane Armitage, Practice Manager of the Year 05,06,07,09. Jane Armitage is an award-winning practice manager and has almost 40 years industry experience. She is currently a practice manager for Thompson & Thomas, and holds a Vocational Assessors award. She is also a BDA Good Practice Assessor, BDA Good Practice Regional Consultant, and has a BDA Certificate of Merit for services to the profession.

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