Are you drifting or driving your quality management standards?

Glenys Bridges discusses practice investments

As the Care Quality inspectors begin their work in dental practices, some providers are reaping huge benefits from their past investment in management education and training. Those who did not see the need for such an investment now recognise that the current financial environment in the UK is not showing any signs of making a U-turn any time soon. Although some practices have not been adversely affected by the recession, many have seen a drop in patient numbers and demand for high end treatments. In response the ‘drivers’ have simply cut right back on optional spending, whereas the ‘ drifters’ have taken a more strategic approach and prioritised business development with a focus upon ‘Return on Investment’.

Leading companies across all business sectors have long histories of investing in management training and prioritised business development when faced with financial turbulence. This is because they recognise that their long term success is linked to its ability to produce excellent managers who can outperform the financial limitations. They also recognise that benefits cascade from the way that managers that train together create strong networks, leading to on-going relationships based upon knowledge-sharing between peers who trust one another.

Since huge sectors of the dental profession chose not to invest in management training in robust economic times, it would take a huge leap of faith for them to make such an investment now. One way to look at this is to see management as having three main ingredients- economics, sociology and psychology. In this way we justify the investment in terms of motivated employees, building a better team, or organisation. This is a working example of psychological and sociological aspects creating a desirable whole team approach to essential standards of quality and safety. With these in place the practice is in a stronger position slot the final piece of the puzzle into place- economic success.

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The problem may well be that although you have a happy motivated team and patients; the current financial environment has resulted in a drop in profits. When profits are squeezed the reactive approach is to cut back on spending. Whereas, the proactive approach is to focus on building capital through developing new skills and networking. One thing is for certain and that is that care quality inspectors will not accept the financial climate as justification for providers lacking strong, whole team processes and procedures for quality management.

One of the problems with the current situation is that the educational requirements for dental practice managers, unlike those for other members of the dental team are not clearly defined. It’s almost as though the regulatory bodies are saying, “Here are the Standards; you work out how you can meet them.”

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It is undoubtable that the quality of UK clinical dentistry is world class. However, nowadays patients demand more than excellent dentistry, they will not settle for less than an excellent dental experience from the moment they decide to make an appointment on until they complete their treatment. This is recognised in care quality outcomes. To consistently achieve these outcomes requires a range of quality management skills, such as Planning services, auditing performance, creating, implementing and evaluating SMART objectives and gathering feedback on clinical and non-clinical aspects of care.

Without formal education these skills will be absent from dental teams’ skills sets, therefore patients’ experiences of quality if their dental experience will suffer.

From a quality standard should this be an issue that needs addressing. The Campaign for Administrative Standards and Professional Education for Receptionists and Practice Managers (CASPER) has gathered high profile dental professionals who believe that qualifications for practice managers and receptionists are the next logical step in the progression of the dental profession and are urging the GDC and CQC to formalise a non-clinical curricular framework.

If you would like to add your voice to ours, simply email: “I agree that the dental profession needs definitive non-clinical educational and CPD standards for dental managers and administrators” to casper.campaign@gmail.com

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