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 ‘drifters’ have simply cut right back on optional spending, whereas the ‘drivers’ 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 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.

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.'
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 focus on building capital through developing new skills and networking. One thing is for certain and that is 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 although the regulatory bodies are saying.” Here are the Standards; you work out how you can meet them.”

It is undisputable 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 make an appointment.