Dental Tribune speaks with DPAS’ Quentin Skinner and Andrew Warren as the company celebrates 15 years of dental plan provision

DPAS was born on a sunny day in the summer of 1996 when Quentin Skinner was looking to establish the next generation in dental payment plan provision. Quentin was no stranger to the plan sector having been MD of another provider for some years. Feeling that there was a gap in the market for practices who wished to keep their practice identity independent but still be able to avail themselves of the services of a plan provider, Quentin and his friend and former colleague Andrew Warren set about establishing Dental Payment and Administration Services (DPAS).

Quentin explained: “When I founded DPAS I structured it specifically to be a boring business - when I first set it up it was called Dental Payment and Administration Services Ltd and that was specifically chosen to be particularly descriptive of our role as an administrate sub-contractor for dentistry. Of course, it was also a bit of a mouthful and so it started to be shortened to DPAS; in fact for a long time I was just about the only person who called the company by its full name!”

Passionate
Both Quentin and Andrew are passionate about the company being a support to dental practices by maintaining the collection of plan payment as their core function and not becoming a controlling influence. Quentin said: “The name Dental Payment and Administration Services Ltd was never meant to be shortened to DPAS; in fact for a long time I was just about the only person who called our role as an administrate sub-contractor for dentistry. Of course, it was also a bit of a mouthful and so it started to be shortened to DPAS; in fact for a long time I was just about the only person who called the company by its full name!”

Change as constant
One thing that has remained a constant in the life of DPAS is change. Dentistry has seen many changes - in provision between NHS and private care, in customer spending and expectations as well as in technology and materials that are available to clinicians. They way the company has evolved
with the market is something that Andrew is proud of: “I am excited by the fact that DPAS is a very black and white business, that we do what we said we were going to do on the tin and we do it well. This we know from our customers telling other customers - that’s how we grow. And that’s where we’ve evolved – we’ve been building up that reputation all the time. We can sit here very relaxed and comfortably: we have great retention, our customers are comfortable to come to us, we’re comfortable with our customers, and we go in a very sort of orderly manner.

“We have also evolved in ourselves, for example I’ve changed the title of our sales force from the words sales to consultancy; we want to grow in a certain way and with the right people. What with changing the title of our sales team away from sales into consultancy, it’s enabled us to hopefully dental practices to realise that by booking an appointment with us doesn’t mean to say they’ve got to sign a piece of paper, it means to say that we’re going to help them decide whether the NHS is the viable position for them, and many a day we advise dentists to take a slightly different course of action from what they were going to do. We’re not confined and we don’t have the problem of constant target making to try and make our business work. And because we don’t, we grow faster.”

Location location
A unique feature of DPAS is their location. Based on a country estate in Tisbury, a small Wiltshire village that dates back to the 8th century, the sleepy rural surroundings hide the driving ambition to deliver for their customers a high quality service. Heavy investment in areas such as print and mailing as well as IT infrastructure and patient registration software keeps the company at the cutting edge of customer service, in tranquil surroundings that certainly help to keep the stress levels down when the next wave of practice conversions comes in! Yet it is still less than a two-hour train journey into the heart of London.

The tranquility of DPAS’s headquarters was a perfect backdrop to the company’s anniversary celebrations; held on a sunny day in July (much like the day Quentin came up with the concept for DPAS). Lord, Ladies, clinicians, friends and colleagues joined DPAS staff for a celebratory lunch on the central lawn of the premises. Andrew welcomed guests, and then paved the way for a presentation by Quentin, who gave a short history of the company, thanking those who have been supportive of the DPAS dream over the years. He also put in context the current situation in dentistry, piloting, the unstable position of PCTs, UDAs and the ongoing recession. He commented that the ‘swing towards private dentistry is still inevitable’, showing that in the next 15 years plan providers such as DPAS will continue to be very busy indeed.

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