Apprenticeships

Jane Armitage looks at apprenticeships as a suitable staffing solution

Working in a busy dental practice can sometimes become hectic, how often do you have a rota and have to redo it as suddenly you are short staffed due to illness etc.

It’s at these times when you wish you had an extra pair of hands.

Yes we have the support of agencies but this comes at a financial cost.

Induction

A good induction programme will benefit both parties. However with agency staff although you will give an overview of what is expected it is not in depth as there isn’t the time, that nurse is required in surgery to cover at short notice so if you haven’t the time to do a full induction and having just done an overview who’s at fault if something goes wrong?

During last winter the viruses struck and at one point we had several staff off sick at the same time which meant juggling clinics, finding relief staffing who obviously are unsure where anything is (which can add even more pressure to the day). We worked through it but it did make you think of an alternative suitable back up.

There’s nothing worse than having to cancel a list especially due to staffing shortage, this should never happen. Normally patients will accept illness or circumstances happen, however I found myself in this position only a few weeks ago. The reason for cancelling was a parental bereavement to one of the dentists even in this sad circumstance but a couple of members of the public weren’t amused. So cancelling due to staffing problems is not a good idea.

In the past if we have a vacant post I would advertise and employ a qualified nurse suitable for the position. The advantage of this is the qualified part and also it delivers a service to the patients and it maintains the current staffing levels. Even though staffing levels are fine, an extra pair of hands is always welcome which is why I decided to look at employing an apprentice nurse. My reason for this was although at that point we were fully staffed, if we could train an apprentice from scratch they would work to our protocols and hopefully quickly adapt. I personally think that if a young person has already enrolled at College for the dental nurse course that shows they already have an interest; the requirement is they enrol but then need to find a placement.

At the time of writing the cost to the practice is £2.60 per hour for employees aged 16 – 18, there is a slight increase coming in October. This rate is not set in stone and can be increased at the discretion of the practice.
Extra money can always be paid as an incentive. The apprentice NMW applies to all 16-to-18 year olds and to those aged 19 and over in the first year of their apprenticeship.

If the apprentice is aged 19 and/or has completed their first year of the apprenticeship you must pay the national minimum wage appropriate for their age.

There is also the cost of supervision and training supplied by the college, the National Apprenticeship Service will match the employers commitment to hiring apprentices by covering in full the training costs or if over 19 a very small fee will be payable by the practice.

The college course is NVQ-based with day release once a fortnight.

At the moment there is an employers’ incentive grant scheme available until funding ceases early next year.

This is aimed at eligible employers offering employment through the apprenticeship programme. This scheme assists by providing wage grants to anyone recruiting an apprentice. The criterion is The National Apprenticeship Service will provide 40,000 Apprenticeship grants to employers recruiting 16 – 24 year olds with a value of £1,500.

The £1,500 is in addition to the training costs of the apprenticeship framework which are met in full for ages 16 – 18 and 50 per cent for those aged 19 – 24.

Eligible employers must have never employed an apprentice before or who have not been in a position to commit to employing an apprentice again within the last 12 months.

I believe this is worth knowing; it’s a small amount but it’s money that is available.

Looking back this has been one of the best decisions I have made. It’s a cost effective way of training with no strings attached.

Downsides being after two years you are likely to have become attached to this apprentice who is aware from the outset there is no guarantee of a permanent job on qualification. This decision then lies with you do you employ them or start the process again.

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About the author

Jane Armitage, Practice Manager of the Year 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009 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. PM of the year 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009 BDA Certificate of Merit for services to the profession. UK Outstanding achievement award 2011. Readers can contact janearmi@btinternet.com

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