Being a practice manager

First and foremost how do you appoint a practice manager? For many practice managers they have fallen into this role having been in a practice for a lengthy period of time, some do the work but are not named practice manager and for others it is the total opposite – they do have the title, but only do a small part of this role.

What is the role? This is a question that I am often asked by dentists considering appointing a practice manager. I describe it to them as being “a practice manager takes all the administration away from you allowing you to focus simply on the clinical aspect”. For almost all dentists the prospect of no administration is highly appealing, but to some it can be a daunting prospect. Some dentists actually enjoy doing the clinical all day and the administration in the evening...

Release control
Some dentists are not ready to release control to another member of the team. A small minority will have a member of their family doing administration for them e.g. wife/husband.

I was a practice manager for several years in a small private practice in Glasgow. I managed a very small team of just four, with a patient list of approximately 600 patients; a large number of which were on a dental plan. This was a fairly easy team, but there were very limited prospects for both me and the team.

I completed payroll, the hiring and disciplining of all staff, the writing and implementing of procedures, the training of staff, reconciling the income and expenditure, chairing all team meetings and appraising all dental nurses and hygienists.

In comparison I have just completed several months of secondment to one of our practices in Thurso. A fully NIS practice with four dentists and a therapist, we have more than 4000 patients (this practice opened in January 2012) and more than 1000 still on the waiting list. I managed a team of 22 and because I had a business manager to support me I found that the workload was halved. I didn’t do payroll, or reconciling of bank statements, or chair team meetings. I did however complete appraisals and for such a large team it is hard work.

For anyone considering going into practice management here are my top ten tips:

1. Remain positive – even when things are tough
2. Reassure your team regularly
3. Praise them – I used to write articles about how great my team was
4. Be open and honest with them and encourage feedback
5. Have and instil into them an open door policy
6. Be ready to accept that not everyone will be on-board with any changes or the way that you do things
7. When embarking on change ask them for input you never know they may have a unique suggestion
8. Never say no to something without explaining your reasoning – this gains respect
9. Be sure to recruit the right team – it’s much better to spend time on the recruitment process rather than sorting a problem member of staff
10. Never panic or flap in front of them – keep this for behind a closed door!

Try to enjoy your role
Having a dental nurse background is a huge advantage. Every practice manager should be able to explain what is required of their staff, if you don’t have the dental background you can often struggle to get “buy-in” from the team. I have seen teams run rings around practice managers who do not have dental background.

A lot of practice managers suffer from stress as this can be a stressful role. It is crucial to be able to identify this early on and not become a victim.

As someone I know says “you can be smiling on the outside and screaming on the inside”.

About the author
Jill Taylor is a qualified registered dental nurse, dental radiographer, trainer and practice manager. Jill is Seconded practice manager, member of the Dental Nurses and the current president of the Association of Dental Administrators and Managers. Jill has worked in both private practice and NHS since 1991. Jill has also worked in the hotel industry and has a passion for excellent customer service. Jill has a vast array of experience from managing a small private practice with only four staff and less than 500 patients to the opposite extreme state of the art, brand new NIS practice with a team of twenty-two with over 4000 patients (and another 2000 on the waiting list). Jill is currently employed by The Dental Business Academy as both a Practice Management Adviser and as Senior Practice Liaison for “SUSAN - The Practice Managers Best Friend” cloud based practice management system. Alongside this Jill is also involved in the mentorship of practices using SUSAN.