Mentoring strategy in dental teams
Glenys Bridges discusses mentoring

The concept of senior colleagues supporting the work of more junior colleagues, by sharing the benefits of their hands-on experience is a time-honoured activity. To take this a stage further as part of their induction processes, an increasing number of practices are creating budding relationships. Their aim is to formalise a skills transfer process which previously happened in an ad hoc style. In many cases guidance from a senior colleague has been very much valued by employers and employees alike. This article explores ways to build a mentoring strategy for your practice, which will secure increased benefits from these beneficial interactions.

I am often asked if mentoring is just another name for coaching. The answer is that although there is significant crossover in these interactions, essentially mentors must have actual hands-on experience and expertise in the work role of their mentee. Whereas, in coaching the expertise is coaching rather than applied skills. In this way many business coaches have not ‘walked in the shoes’ of their clients. Because the dental team mentor’s skills are in the delivery of dental care, to support their work the practice needs to create a mentoring strategy and provide training and support. In this way all parties are able to secure measurable benefits through mentoring.

Mentoring success depends upon numerous factors, not least finding a best fit mentor and mentee match. A structured mentoring process must be managed in exactly the same way as all other practice activities. This begins with a clear vision to create the design, implementation, support and evaluation processes for your mentoring scheme.

Successful mentoring is dependent upon the participation of senior colleagues as mentors and also as mentees. This is a prime example of leading from the top. The best mentoring schemes start small and grow gradually, stimulated by enthusiasm, positive examples and organisational support. Here is some guidance for the creation of an effective mentoring scheme at your practice:

• Establish the purpose of the scheme - Define who will be involved, what they will do and the expected results. Begin by finding out what mentoring is already happening on an informal basis and assess how valued this format of learning and development is at present.

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After the Initial stages

As with all relationships, mentoring relationships grow and develop. New employees will inevitably look to established colleagues for practical information to help them find their way around in their new workplace. Once these pragmatic needs have been met, innate learning styles will take over and input of a particular mentor may not be appreciated. In such cases this should not be viewed negatively, simply as an acceptance of a progression of needs and the way forward to building the next level of mentoring relationship.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What kind of things will be talked about?</th>
<th>Open and transparent relationship</th>
<th>Provide a specific mentor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mentor-mentee relationship is general knowledge</td>
<td>Private mentoring environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Personal development opportunities are enriched</td>
<td>Style of the mentoring interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The practice needs to provide boundaries for individuals to design their mentoring relationship.