

# Business skills

David Worskett introduces three newly launched bursary awards.

Dentists have always required and often demonstrated a large degree of entrepreneurial nous. This is partly due to the fact patients have always had to pay at point of service. Unlike other services provided by for the NHS, dentists have to consider marketing and practice promotion as part of their core skill sets. There is real competition within the sector and therefore many dentists have to combine clinical skills with business ones. Corporate and group dental providers are able to provide dentists with particularly strong support in developing and applying business acumen. This is especially welcome to those dentists who want to focus as much as possible on dentistry, confident that the business is being well run. A growing number in the profession have reservations about the burdens and liabilities of the traditional owner–equity partner model. As in other professions such as the law, a proportion of highly qualified and experienced professionals prefer the associate or non-equity partner option.

Dentists who work within group or corporate structures have the opportunity to go in a number of directions if they so choose. They can continue to focus on clinical and patient care, or move more into management. However, no matter which direction dentists choose, an understanding of business skills is



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needed as profitability and professional practice are important for any successful dental practice.

Whichever route a dentist takes, the business and regulatory environment in which dentists practice is more complex, sophisticated and demanding than ever before. The Association of Dental Groups sees it as vital that students become adept at being able to run and promote their practices early on in their career. Unfortunately, despite the existence of relevant domains many students don't really learn these skills until they are on the job, not least because the formal training priority should always focus primarily on clinical skills and patient care. Students should however have more of an opportunity and incentive to focus on practice management and the key business skills to enable them, once they have graduated, to be able to develop their careers in every way possible, whatever type of practice they work in. That is in the students' best interests and in the best interests of a flourishing and sustainable dental sector as a whole. Students should have the opportunity to develop core skills such as marketing, internal practice efficiencies and long and short term business planning. Furthermore, students need to understand that in future they will need to have a strong grasp of HR and regulatory issues as well.

To back up this view and offer some practical incentives to students, the ADG has established three bursary



awards. There are two separate categories for undergraduates, one for management and one for professionalism, both of which are aimed primarily at current or very recent fourth year dental students. There are three prizes for both sections, first prize receives £1,000, second £750 and third prize receives £250.

The management award relates to the current management and leadership domain which has four major competencies. They are personal and practice organisation; legislative; financial; and leadership and management.

The second under-graduate bursary, professionalism, also refers to four major competencies: ethics, professionalism with regard to patients; professionalism with regard to self; professionalism with regard to clinical team and peers.

At a postgraduate level the ADG has established a £5,000 bursary that will be awarded for voluntary work that is UK or worldwide and linked to improving and promoting better oral health. This bursary award has been designed to not only promote best practice and allow post-graduate students to demonstrate their capabilities, but also to underscore the importance of proper business planning if such worthwhile initiatives are to have their full impact.

The industry is changing more quickly than ever before. All types of practice are facing increasing pressure, as is the whole of the health sector, to offer patients the best quality care while operating ever more efficiently and profitably. It is therefore important that students are encouraged to develop these skills so that once they become fully qualified dentists they are able to give of their best.