

AN ENRICHING AND STIMULATING CAREER – A TYPICAL DAY AS A DENTIST IN A VIBRANT SEASIDE PRACTICE

BY DR AMIT PATEL, {MY}DENTIST – A MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF DENTAL GROUPS (ADG)

I work as a predominantly NHS dentist in a lovely practice close to the beach in Bognor Regis. However, what really makes Bognor Regis great is the vast array of eclectic personalities and wholesome West Sussex charm. From a dental perspective, Bognor Regis is a high needs area, which does present with many interesting clinical and patient management challenges. If life were easy though, there would be no fun! It gives the team and I the chance to put our range of skills to the test.

A normal day always begins by making the reception staff and nurse a cup of tea. They truly are the unsung heroes of healthcare and deserve recognition for their efforts and so this is just a small way of showing my appreciation. From there onwards, the day consists of seeing around 30 patients with a mixture of treatments that tends to include denture work, extractions and fillings. Regular examinations are booked in along with daily emergency slots.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Dentistry is not a straightforward job, especially when dealing with emergencies, and so you never quite know what the next patient will present. The 15-minute allocated appointment slot can involve dealing with anything from a simple mouth ulcer to a screaming child who has suffered a trauma. A vital competency of a dentist is to be adaptable to new situations and to have the skills to manage often dental-phobic patients.

I have worked in many independent practices before but since starting at {my}dentist I can honestly say that the potential to develop has been superb. I feel a key difference is the marketing support offered to advertise your services. Professionally developed posters and leaflets are available to place in the surgery and they give advice to patients on topics such as oral hygiene, while also advertising more complex treatments like private dentures or Botulinum Toxin.

Without this publicity, most patients would not know about the full range of services that we have on offer. Recently the company launched the 'smile checker'. This is a leaflet that the reception staff ask patients to complete before they enter the surgery. This gives me an opportunity to discuss private cosmetic treatments with the patient based on how they feel about their smile. This doesn't only help increase my private revenue but it also enables patients to think about their smile and what they would like to change.

THE DENTAL THERAPIST

The corporate has also assisted me in recruiting a dental therapist, which has been amazing. We work as a clinical team for the benefit of our patients. I can allocate procedures such as periodontal cleaning and fillings to my colleague and this frees up my time for more complex treatments. Thus, waiting lists are shortened, output is increased and once again patients leave here even happier.

In the future, I hope to join the 'Mentor Scheme' offered by the group whereby I would take on a newly qualified dentist and share my knowledge and skills with them. It is a wonderful opportunity to be part of a teaching-based format and give something back to the profession.

DEVELOPING THE FUTURE – CLINICAL SUPPORT MANAGERS

These are a few ways that I have found to grow and develop. Some of my colleagues have become Clinical Support Managers (CSMs); essentially a 'Head Dentist' for an area, such as Sussex, supporting the clinicians in around 20 dental practices. They are on call to help clinicians with complex cases, CPD, complaints or simply how to work more efficiently. It is reassuring to know that you have an experienced clinician at the other end of the telephone to go to for advice, at any time. The CSM also arranges peer review evenings where

clinicians from different practices get together and discuss varied subjects; these are highly supported by the area development manager. Area and Regional Manager positions are also available for those seeking even greater responsibilities.

A very important part of the role as a dentist is to keep abreast of the latest in dentistry by undertaking regular CPD. The corporate I work for has created an 'academy' that provides hours of courses, from basic life support to composite fillings, root canal treatment and cosmetic orthodontics. Further still, it is all provided free of charge or at a reduced rate. This is another example of an opportunity you would probably not get in an independent practice.

There are frequently discussions amongst peers about joining the 'corporate machine', which is often viewed (incorrectly) to be more concerned with generating greater profit, than focusing on patients. However, from my own perspective, I would like to completely debunk this thought. I have never once been asked to compromise on patient care. Of course, I have a Unit of Dental Activity (UDA) target which is set by myself, not by the corporate. To be honest, the target is easily reached by simply working hard and with thanks to the administrative and nursing support provided by the group. Finally, the materials supplied are the same, if not better than what you would use in an independent practice, so thankfully they have not sought to cut costs here.

With the assistance of {my}dentist, my practice team and the Clinical Support Managers, as well as treating a diverse patient demographic, I feel enriched and stimulated everyday that I step into the practice.

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