

## **BUSINESS HINTS AND TIPS**

**Deputy Chief Dental Officer at Denplan, Henry Clover, discusses the issues currently facing the profession and how payment plan providers can offer a range of services to ensure your practice can thrive.**

Over the last four years, the dental profession has seen the new NHS contract and subsequent Steele Review, the GDC piloting re-validation, the Dental Access Programme introducing another new NHS contract (“PDS Plus”) and stringent decontamination guidelines. Add into this the recent economic environment, and it is hardly surprising that general practice can be stressful and demanding.

I converted my own practice away from the NHS back in 1993 and, in my experience, offering a payment plan can have a hugely positive impact on your business – and things have moved on leaps and bounds since then! The information below is designed to show how offering a payment plan to your patients can not only offer financial stability for your business, but help keep you informed on the latest developments in the dental industry and provide a range of additional services so you can get back to offering the preventive, patient-focused dentistry you trained for.

### **Support**

With a constant stream of legislation, regulation, reports and guidance coming through into the profession, dentistry can often seem both bewildering and exasperating, especially for newly qualified dentists. The time and money needed to comply and keep up-to-date with these can also place a real strain on practices.

This is where payment plan providers can sometimes step in, as some can not only keep you up-to-date with industry news, but develop useful templates and advice manuals for their members to refer to. Some can also offer quality assurance programmes designed to ensure you meet industry standards and comply with regulation.

## **Development**

CPD is mandatory for all GDC registrants, so it's really important that practices utilise helpful services and training to make their lives easier. But I also believe that development should be about more than accumulating CPD hours in order to fulfil annual quotas. It should be part of a structured development plan to benefit both your practice and your patients.

Some providers offer tailor-made training, which can incorporate modules suitable for the whole practice team; as well as offering verifiable CPD, so this can be a great place to start. Denplan, for example, has recently launched The Denplan Stairway Programme – a structured development programme designed to be relevant to dentists at any stage of a general practice career.

The Programme aims to provide professional education in a relevant and practical format and has now also received official recognition from the University of Birmingham - equating to two optional modules towards an MSc in Primary Dental Care. It includes a series of units, each comprising a study day and a practice-based project on clinical and practice management aspects of running a practice.

Each unit can earn an individual up to 20 hours of CPD, or two educational credits. Accumulation of 20 credits leads to the Denplan Stairway Award, which can then be counted towards attaining an MSc in Primary Dental Care at Birmingham University for those who wish to take their studies forward more formally. This makes the Programme not only invaluable for training and development, but also a potential springboard towards gaining a substantial qualification recognised by peers and patients alike.

## **Growth**

I think it's reasonable to assert that the image and marketing of your practice are vital tools when it comes to supporting your practice and growing your business. That's why some payment plan providers have designed a range of training and literature to help you promote your practice, as well as offering bespoke public relations services to get your latest news, comments and achievements into your local paper.

Choosing a provider with a recognised brand can also help your practice grow in a more tangible way. For example, Denplan recently became a promotional partner of the latest Twentieth Century Fox movie Tooth Fairy, starring Dwayne Johnson and Julie Andrews\*. As a national consumer facing brand Denplan were able to launch a nationwide campaign, designed to highlight the benefits of good oral health for children in a fun and engaging way, as well as support dentists and private dentistry.

Family competitions were also featured across key regional press, to drive patients directly into practices; creating opportunities for practice teams to promote their products and services, and a host of Tooth Fairy themed materials were provided to members to ensure they could make the most of campaign.

### **Extras**

So, what else is on offer from payment plan providers these days? The tips above have hopefully given you an idea of some of the value-added services available and, if utilised effectively, these services cannot only help your practice attract new patients and maintain them long into the future, but they can also give you the tools and information you need to help both your practice and your team thrive!

\*[www.toothfairymovie.co.uk](http://www.toothfairymovie.co.uk)

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### **About the Author:**

#### **Dr Henry Clover – Deputy Chief Dental Officer**

Henry is a former general dental practitioner who converted his own practice to private practice in 1993. With his experience as a Denplan member dentist, he joined Denplan's Professional Services department on a part-time basis in 1998 and full-time in 1999, with responsibility for professional support and member services. He was made Deputy Chief Dental Officer in 2010 and represents Professional Services on the Denplan Executive Leadership Team.