

GOING GREEN WITH DENPLAN

Steve Gates, Managing Director at Denplan, discusses why 'going green' is so important for dental practices in this unsteady financial climate.

In our personal lives we are comfortable with and have for many years recycled our paper and glass. Now, at last, sustainability appears to be becoming a factor in our working lives too.

However, like any business, for a dental practice to become 'carbon-neutral' and truly environmentally friendly would take a vast amount of time and resource. With the financial climate the way it is, it is easy to see why green issues don't always take priority and often drop off many practices' agendas.

This is not good news, as operating a greener business is not only good for the environment, but it could also benefit your practice. By implementing simple yet effective initiatives it could not only save you thousands of pounds, but it could also help you attract new patients and provide a unique selling point for local media coverage. Here are some good first steps:

Recycle

Ensure, where possible, that there are recycle bins close to the end of desks or near printers. Look into the possibility of having separate bins for glass, paper and plastics, or even a compost bin for waste food in the kitchen. It might take a while for these to fill up in smaller practices, but will show your patients that you are taking responsibility and helping the environment.

Why not also try removing the team's personal waste baskets, and the bins in reception to encourage individuals to use the recycle bins? Denplan adopted this approach in 2007 and since then have experienced a 60% reduction in non-recycled waste.

Save energy

Leaving your PC and monitor on standby mode rather than switching them off at the end of the working day could use an additional 17% of unnecessary energy in any given 7 days*.

Computers and monitors account for half the electricity wasted everyday in any office, including dental practices.

* www.biggreenswitch.co.uk

Think before you print

It is easy to print documents and emails without thinking, but if you are printing, select the 'print on both sides' option and remove any unwanted text or diagrams to ensure you only print what you really need. You could also try and adopt a paperless approach to keeping patient records, as modern technology allows for the safe, secure and convenient storage of information without filling up your cupboards.

Also, if you tend to write to your patients to remind them of appointments, or to let them know about offers and practice news, why not check if they have an email address to reduce the amount of printing and save money on postage? If you are sending an email, you could also include a footnote on the email which reads – Think before you print. This will remind the recipient not to print out unnecessary emails and documents.

Water, water everywhere

In the UK mains drinking water is highly regulated and meets very high standards. If you choose tap water over bottled water, it uses 300 times less energy than is required to produce bottled water, due to the packaging and delivery factors involved in the process. It also means that you don't have plastic bottles contributing to your overall waste.

Washer disinfectors may be essential for decontamination, but they use huge quantities of energy and water. To reduce the impact this will have on your finances and the environment you should ensure that taps throughout the practice are fully turned off, as a dripping tap can contribute to litres of water being wasted every day.

Waste not, want not

In a bid to reduce the amount of waste your practice produces, you could try offering your patients a glass of water on their arrival, rather than having a water cooler with plastic cups in the waiting area. This will not only reduce your environmental impact, but it will also show your patients that you are dedicated to customer service and offer them personal attention.

Installing hand dryers in rest-rooms, instead of paper towels, may involve an initial investment, it can be very beneficial. Denplan choose to install Dyson hand dryers that use 20% less energy than standard models. By doing this, we predict that there will be a reduction of around 2.5 million hand towels over the next five years, saving in the region of £12,000.

Car sharing and public transport

If your practice team drive to work, why not encourage a lift sharing scheme. This will not only help reduce pollution levels, but could also save them some money. Additionally, as part of your green initiatives, remind your team that driving smoothly and sticking to the speed limit can reduce fuel consumption and climate effects and ultimately save them money. There are also national cycle and walk to work days which could not only encourage those who live locally to participate, but could also provide some great publicity for your practice in the local media. Some businesses can now even apply for a Cycle to Work tax exemption loan, which is available for bikes and relevant cycling equipment, to encourage people to cycle to work.

Next steps

After these more basic plans have been put into place and are running successfully, you can think about moving things forward and implementing a formal policy. This could look into anything from carbon emissions, energy efficiency, water usage and much more.

It is, however, desirable that you have the full support from your practice team before you do this as you are more likely achieve your goals if your colleagues feel that they too have ownership of the plan. Remember to keep your team regularly updated in order to keep the issue fresh as this will increase the likelihood of sustaining the initiatives that you have put in place. Making 'green thinking' part of everyday work and your ongoing business decisions will increase the longevity of your plans.

Denplan's environmental policy and practices have become a much larger factor with both our customers and our employees in recent years. In fact, we take great pride in our green practices and see this very much as another of our value-added services. Small changes really can make a big difference.

Notes to Editors:

About Denplan

Denplan Limited, part of the AXA Group, is the UK's leading dental payment plan specialist. There are more than 6,500 member dentists nationwide treating over 1.8 million Denplan registered patients. Established in 1986 by two dentists who pioneered the concept of dental payment plans, Denplan has been in the heart of dental care for over 22 years. Today, Denplan arranges a range of plans for adults and children, enabling patients to spread the cost of their dental care through a fixed monthly fee. Denplan supports regular attendance and preventive care, reducing the need for clinical intervention and helping patients to maintain healthy teeth and gums for life.

Patient enquiries telephone: 0800 401 402

Dentist enquiries telephone: 0800 328 3223

www.denplan.co.uk

Denplan Care: all routine and restorative care + worldwide dental injury and dental emergency cover

Denplan Essentials: routine care only + worldwide dental injury and dental emergency cover

Plans for Children: routine and other agreed care + worldwide dental injury and dental emergency cover

Denplan Emergency: worldwide dental injury and dental emergency cover only

Denplan Enhance: interest-free patient loans of £250 – £25,000 for dental treatment

Company Dental Plans: company funded, voluntary and flexible benefit schemes

Denplan also provides a range of professional services for its member dentists, including the Denplan Quality Programme, Denplan Excel accreditation programme and Denplan Training.

Patient enquiries telephone: 0800 401 402 Dentist enquiries telephone: 0800 328 3223

www.denplan.co.uk

About AXA

AXA is a world leader in financial protection. AXA's operations are diverse with major operations in Western Europe, North America and the Asia/Pacific area. AXA employs 110,000 staff and reported total revenues for the full year 2006 of €79 billion, underlying earnings of €4,010 million and had €1,315 billion in assets under management as of 31 December 2006. Our previous company performance is not a guide to how we may perform in the future.

AXA's ordinary shares are listed and trade under the symbol AXA on the Paris Stock Exchange. AXA American Depository Shares (ADSs) are listed on the NYSE under the ticker symbol AXA.

For more information:

Aideen Kavanagh / Lia Dean / Mia Edwards

Denplan Press Office

Tel: 01962 827 997 / 01962 828 194

Pressoffice@denplan.co.uk