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FEBRUARY 2026

## DENTISTRY

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1. Bosma, M.L., McGuire, J.A., DelSasso, A. et al. Efficacy of flossing and mouth rinsing regimens on plaque and gingivitis: a randomized clinical trial. BMC Oral Health 24, 178 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12903-024-03924-4> 2. Araujo MWB, Charles CA, Weinstein RB, McGuire JA, Parikh-Das AM, Du Q, Zhang J, Berlin JA, Gunsolley JC. Meta-analysis of the effect of an essential oil-containing mouthrinse on gingivitis and plaque. J Am Dent Assoc. 2015;146(8):610-622. doi:10.1016/j.adaj.2015.02.011 3. EFP: Guidelines for effective prevention of periodontal diseases (2014). Available at: <https://www.efp.org/news-events/perio-workshop/past-workshops/perio-workshop-2014/>



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# PRIVATE DENTISTRY

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# Rewrite the rulebook

Siobhan Hiscott  
Group managing editor

I can hardly believe we've already crunched through the first month of 2026. But here we are with January done and dusted!

The safe arrival of February has created quite a buzz at FMC – as it means the North of England Dentistry Show is now only a few weeks away.

I've attended all the big dental shows over the last two decades – and while I've loved catching up with readers, contributors and industry leaders, I've always felt that the standard format of most events is a bit... predictable. Year after year, the same staid topics are played out in the lectures, and you find yourself wandering aisles of identikit conference halls.

Which is why I've been so excited over the plans for this year's North of England Dentistry Show. Taking place on Friday 13 February in Manchester, it promises to be an event like no other – and is sure to be a breath of fresh air.

Yes, there'll be lectures. Yes, there'll be trade stands. Yes, there'll be networking. But underpinning all these essential dental event elements is a desire to rewrite the rulebook and bring bold ideas, open debate, and fearless voices to the fore.

Setting the tone is Dr Miguel Stanley. The world-renowned

clinician is flying in from Portugal to present a two-hour keynote session that will see the future of comprehensive and ethical dentistry in the spotlight.

Across the three stages, there is one shared goal – to explore what's next for UK dentistry. And there are some dental heavyweights ready to disrupt the status quo of dental practice: Robbie Hughes, Milad Shadrooh, Cat Edney, James Goolnik, Martina Hodgson, Victoria Sampson, Avijit Banerjee to name just a few.

If that weren't enough, the NOE Scan Challenge brings together leading innovators in dentistry with prizes that can move the needle for your practice. It's an incredible opportunity to win a practice growth hamper worth more than £10,000. Check out all the details on page 14.

With live podcast sessions and a vast array of industry initiatives on offer, Manchester's AO Arena will take on an experiential vibe throughout the day, while the weekend warm-up will be the perfect way to unwind after the show with guest DJ sets, drinks and networking.

This year's North of England Dentistry Show will see the clinical, business and tech sides of dentistry collide – not to sell, but to solve. And I can't wait.

So, if you're ready to challenge old ideas, share what's working and explore what's next then I'll see you in Manchester!





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#### **NORTH OF ENGLAND DENTISTRY SHOW**

Don't miss your chance to attend this year's North of England Dentistry Show – coming to AO Arena in Manchester on 13 February. Turn to page 14 to find out what's in store at this year's event.

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# PRIVATE

## DENTISTRY

### MISSION STATEMENT

*Private Dentistry* is an essential reference for dental practice development in the 21st century, focused on helping practices evolve sustainably, operate innovatively, and thrive.

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# PRIVATE DENTISTRY

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Calls are recorded for training and compliance purposes.

# NHS dental contract reforms announced

The government has revealed the latest overhaul of the NHS dental contract, with prioritisation given to patients with the most urgent dental needs. Dubbed 'the most significant modernisation of the NHS dental contract in years' by the government, the changes follow a consultation with the sector and the public. The reforms – which will be introduced from April 2026 – will include incentives for dentists to provide emergency and complex treatments through the introduction of a standardised payment package.

The changes include:

- A new, time-limited care pathway for patients with more complex dental needs
- Better payments for more complex treatment, which is often poorly paid under the current contract
- Payments linked to activity that helps reduce dental disease, rather than just treating problems once they occur
- New funding to support clinical audits and peer review within dental practices
- A requirement for practices to provide a set level of urgent dental care, with improved pay for this work.

Minister of state for care Stephen Kinnock said: 'We inherited a broken NHS dental system and have worked at pace to start fixing it – rolling out urgent and emergency appointments and bringing in supervised toothbrushing for young children in the most deprived areas.'

'Now we are tackling the deep-rooted problems so patients can have faith in NHS dentistry – these changes will make it easier for anyone with urgent dental needs to get NHS treatment, preventing painful conditions from spiralling into avoidable hospital admissions.'

'This is about putting patients first and supporting those with the greatest need, while backing our NHS dentists, making the contract more attractive, and giving them the resources to deliver more.'

'This marks the first step towards a new era for NHS dentistry after a decade of decline, one that delivers for patients and our dedicated dental professionals.'

## THE PROFESSION'S RESPONSE

Dr Nigel Carter, chief executive of the Oral Health Foundation, said:

'The proposed reforms acknowledge some of the pressures within NHS dentistry, particularly for patients with complex needs, but they stop short of the fundamental change the system requires. Adjusting contractual mechanisms may improve continuity of care for a small cohort of patients, but it does not resolve the structural problems that limit access or drive dentists away from NHS provision.'

'Without sustained investment in prevention, early intervention and population-level public health measures, demand will continue to exceed capacity. A model that remains weighted towards managing disease rather than preventing it risks perpetuating the very pressures these reforms are meant to address.'

Shiv Pabary, chair of the British Dental Association's (BDA) General Dental Practice Committee, said: 'These are the biggest tweaks this failed contract has seen in its history. We do hope changes can make things easier for practices and patients in the interim, but this cannot be the end of road. We need a response proportionate to the challenges we face, to give NHS dentistry a sustainable future.'

The public consultation ran for six weeks from 8 July to 19 August 2025, with 60% from individuals sharing personal views, 33% from individuals sharing professional views, and 7% from organisations.

## Government dentistry underspend falls by 91%

Unused government budget for NHS dentistry has fallen from £392 million in 2023/24 to just £36 million, the care minister has announced.

Minister of state for care Stephen Kinnock told parliament on 13 January that underspending on NHS dentistry had dramatically reduced in the past year.

The large underspend in dentistry has previously been cited as evidence of ample funding available for NHS dentistry. However, the British Dental Association (BDA) said it was likely due to practices being unable to fill vacancies or commit to delivering NHS appointments at a loss.

The association stressed that the reduction in unused budget means there are 'now no excuses for government not to invest in easing the access crisis'.

Shiv Pabary, chair of the BDA General Dental Practice Committee, said: 'Ministers have used the vast underspends in NHS dentistry as an excuse not to invest. Underspends have now all but vanished, yet we still have an access crisis. We have practices delivering NHS care at a loss. Without sustainable funding there is no way to restore care to millions.'



# Low intake of red fruits linked to greater gum disease risk

Insufficient intake of a component found in red coloured fruits such as tomatoes was associated with a 'significantly higher risk' of severe gum disease in a new study.

Dietary lycopene is a carotenoid commonly found in fruits with a red hue such as tomatoes, watermelon and grapefruit. The study, published in *The Journal of Nutrition, Health and Aging*, found that a lack of dietary lycopene was associated with a much greater risk of severe periodontitis among adults aged 65 to 79.

Nearly half (48.7%) of the older adults included in the study had some level of periodontitis, while more than three quarters (77.9%) were not consuming enough dietary lycopene.

After adjusting for contributing factors such as age, sex, race and smoking status, the study found that those who consumed enough lycopene were one third as likely to develop severe periodontitis.

The researchers also found disparities in disease risk by

demographic. For example, severe gum disease was more common among men and non-Hispanic Black adults.

## ORAL HEALTH BENEFITS: OTHER FRUITS

A study published in 2025 in *Archives of Oral Biology* found that a compound derived from apple peel was effective against periodontal disease.

Morin is a natural extract found in guava leaves, apple and fig peels, certain teas and almonds. Researchers from São Paulo State University found that it showed antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects when tested against bacteria that cause periodontal disease.

Study author Luciana Solera Sales said: 'We started developing these systems in the form of tablets, films and microparticles. But until then, they

were too large and unfeasible for oral use. In my PhD, we tried to improve these products by making them smaller.

'That's why I developed this format, which looks like powdered milk. I prepared a solution containing sodium alginate and gellan gum to encapsulate morin in a controlled-release system, which is already widely used for drugs but isn't yet widely used in dentistry.'



# Missing teeth used to predict life expectancy

Having a greater number of missing or decayed teeth has been linked to a shorter life expectancy in a new study.

Researchers from the University of Osaka, Japan found that those with more decayed or missing teeth had a greater risk of earlier death by all causes.

Sound teeth and those that had been filled by a dentist were equally associated with a lower mortality risk.

The authors of the study suggest that decayed teeth may shorten life expectancy due to functional impairment or chronic inflammation.

However, they also acknowledge that other factors could affect the association. For example, low socioeconomic background might lead to both poorer dental health and a shortened life expectancy.

To reach these findings, the University of Osaka team analysed the health and dental records of more than 190,000 adults aged 75 and over.

The study was published in *BMC Oral Health*.

## POOR ORAL HEALTH AND DEMENTIA RISK

Another study from the Institute of Science Tokyo recently found that poor oral health can increase dementia risk through both biological and social mechanisms.

For example, increased inflammatory molecules and oral bacteria might affect the brain and immune system, priming the body for dementia

Common oral health problems that occur in old age such as tooth loss, jaw weakness and dry mouth were also found to exacerbate

social symptoms of dementia like speech loss. This could contribute to neurodegeneration.

Professor Jun Aida from the Institute of Science Tokyo said: 'These functions have a social aspect that facilitates interpersonal interactions and can reduce social isolation. When we consider the multilayered direct and indirect mechanisms leading to dementia throughout life, we find that poor oral health possibly increases the risk of dementia through social isolation via eating and speaking problems.'

Featured in the *Journal of Dental Research*, the study concluded that poor oral health can have wider ramifications that affect the whole body.

Professor Aida added: 'Oral health affects not only the teeth and mouth, but also broader aspects of health, including brain function, nutritional status, and social engagement.'



## **‘It won’t be me’ ... until it is**

**Probably fine.**  
(Until it isn’t.)

As this year begins, we still might say,  
*“It won’t be me. Well not today.”*

That policy waits. The file’s nearby.  
Reviewed last year... or so we tried.

The team all nod. There’s quiet trust.  
Things feel in place. Enough for us.

No drama here. No raised alarm.  
Compliance works best when it’s all calm.

It’s steady habits, clear and sound.  
Not last-minute fixes rushed around.

So for this year, we pause, review.  
We tidy. Check. We follow through.

Not from fear or mounting stress,  
But because being ready just takes less.

With the right support, steady and known,  
We don’t have to carry it alone.

**Amrita Bhambra Nijjar**

*Compliance Manager at  
Dentistry Compliance*



# Last chance to register for North of England Dentistry Show

This year's **North of England Dentistry Show** is fast approaching – here's why you can't afford to miss it

**G**lobal pioneers and dental experts will be starting a new conversation at the North of England Dentistry Show on 13 February.

Taking place at Manchester's AO Arena, the event aims to hit one key goal across its three stages: to rewrite the rulebook and shake dentistry up. Through high-impact sessions, speakers including Miguel Stanley, Robbie Hughes, Martina Hodgson, Cat Edney and Avijit Banerjee will rethink assumptions to dismantle everything you think you know about modern dental practice.

Push beyond the expected – and discover the thinking behind the themes that are truly biting right now.

## GOING OFF SCRIPT

This year's North of England Dentistry Show is for people ready to challenge old ideas, share what's working and explore what's next.

The aim to present one day where the clinical, business and tech sides of dentistry collide – not to sell, but to solve.

Registration opens at 9:30am – and it'll pay to get there early as the first 350 visitors to the Suri stand will receive a free electric toothbrush after the show.

The future won't be built on polite lectures or polished sales pitches. It needs bold ideas, open debate, and fearless voices. And across three stages, the North of England Dentistry Show is set to rewrite the rulebook.

Here's what visitors can expect on each of the stages.

### Clinical Horizons Stage

- Dentistry in 2030 – cracking the code of digital – Robbie Hughes and Jameel Gardee
- No half smiles: the future of comprehensive and ethical dentistry – Miguel Stanley
- Where did it all go wrong? Digital workflows for dentistry that lasts – Ian Buckle.

### Future Health Stage

- A new dawn for diagnostics – James Goolnik, Naz Kazemiga, Muy-Teck Teh and Victoria Sampson
- No half smiles: the future of comprehensive and ethical dentistry (live streamed) – Miguel Stanley
- The new frontier of prevention – Avi Banerjee, Cat Edney, Ben Atkins and Jason Wong.

### Progressive Practice Stage

- Harnessing AI and technology to empower dental practice – Jin Vaghela and Kish Patel
- No half smiles: the future of comprehensive and ethical dentistry (live streamed) – Miguel Stanley
- Driving practice efficiencies and better outcomes through technology – Martina Hodgson.

### AN EXPERIENTIAL EVENT

In addition to the unmissable discussions taking place, attendees can:

- See live 3D printing in action with Sprinray in a dedicated restorative revolution theatre

- Get hands-on with AI tools shaping real clinical workflows, powered by Pearl, Inc
- Take a mindful break in Bupa's calm, tranquil space where you can go to relax and recharge
- Join the Weekend Warm Up – from 4-6pm, enjoy relaxed networking with back-to-back DJ sets and complimentary drinks
- Tune in to the hottest topics in dentistry with our live podcast sessions being held on the day.

Visit [www.dentistry.co.uk/noe](http://www.dentistry.co.uk/noe) to register your free place and be part of the conversation that goes off script.

## Take on the NOE Scan Challenge

This year's NOE Scan Challenge\* brings together leading innovators in dentistry with prizes that genuinely move the needle for your practice. As you make your way around the exhibition, visit participating exhibitors, complete a short activation, scan the code and collect your clues. Every completed stop boosts your chances of winning!

And the prize isn't just one item – it's a full practice growth hamper: a curated bundle of equipment, tools and training designed to accelerate how your practice thinks, works and grows.

### What's inside?

The combined value of practice growth hamper is already estimated at more than £10,000 – and is growing each week. With more being added all the time, it currently includes:

- A 3D printer, courtesy of Shining3D
- Straumann scrubs
- A free trial of the Medit i900M scanner with full training and support, from Trigiene
- Fully funded apprenticeships for practice managers and dental nurses, from Skills4.

This isn't a goody bag, it's a practice upgrade.

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# N.O.E. Dentistry SHOW 2026





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# Hot topics and trends for 2026

**Chris Barrow** answers the question: what's it like being a dental business coach in Q1 2026?



**S**o, what's it like being a dental business coach in Q1 2026? The honest answer is it's like standing at the edge of a fast-moving river and trying to help people cross without getting their shoes wet.

Everyone can see the destination. Everyone knows the crossing matters. And yet, most of the conversations still start with the same sentence: 'We're busy, but...'

## TIME TO THINK

January is always the month of intentions, but 2026 had a particular flavour. So far, the dominant theme across my client calls is not ambition – it's capacity. Not clinical capacity, although that matters, but leadership capacity: the owner's ability to think, decide, delegate and execute without being swallowed by the day.

The most common strategic dilemma is growth without chaos. Practices are sitting at 80 to 90% chair utilisation and feeling the pinch: they want to expand, recruit, add services and improve profitability, but they're wary of making a big move before tightening the engine underneath.

Several discussions have centred on a simple sequence: sweat the asset first, then extend hours, then add chairs, and only then consider new premises or acquisitions. It's remarkably unglamorous, and it works.

Alongside that sits the second big subject: exit planning has become mainstream. Owners are modelling sale outcomes, earn-outs and timelines with more sophistication than I've seen for years. But the best conversations are not about multiples. They're about de-risking: reducing reliance on the principal, cleaning up reporting, and building something that a buyer can operate without the founder's pulse being attached to every decision.

When more than half of EBITDA depends on the principal's hands, you don't have a business to sell; you have a job with a valuation headache.

The third theme is management structure. Many practices have hit what is known as the 'ceiling of complexity': turnover has risen, team size has grown, and the old self-run model has simply run out of road.

The result is predictable: decision bottlenecks, exhausted principals and expansion plans that stall because no one has the bandwidth to run them. The remedy is equally predictable and slightly uncomfortable: you don't need another pair of clinical hands first; you need a business manager (or at least a competent operational lead) to stop the owners acting as the human internet router for the entire organisation.

## TRENDS IN HR AND TECHNOLOGY

Then there's HR. Recruitment frustration and tribunal anxiety are rife. Practices are wrestling with staffing churn, maternity clusters, locum dependency and the ongoing challenge of hiring for attitude rather than an AI-generated CV that looks good in a PDF. The smarter operators are moving to multi-stage recruitment, paid trials and clearer expectations from day one. The less happy ones are still 'panic buying people', which rarely ends well.

The final trend is technology, but not in the way the trade shows promise. The conversations I'm hearing are less 'which shiny device should I buy?' and more 'how do we create a value case and a workflow, so this actually improves profit?'

AI has indeed entered the room – not as science fiction, but as a practical helper: transcription, templated treatment plans, faster communication, and better internal training. Some teams are already using modern tools to clear treatment plan backlogs and improve case acceptance. That's the kind of innovation I like – fascinating, useful, revenue-positive.

## BUILDING A BETTER BUSINESS

Being a dental business coach in Q1 2026 is busy. It's candid. It's occasionally hilarious in that very British way where we describe a business on fire as 'a bit challenging at the moment'.

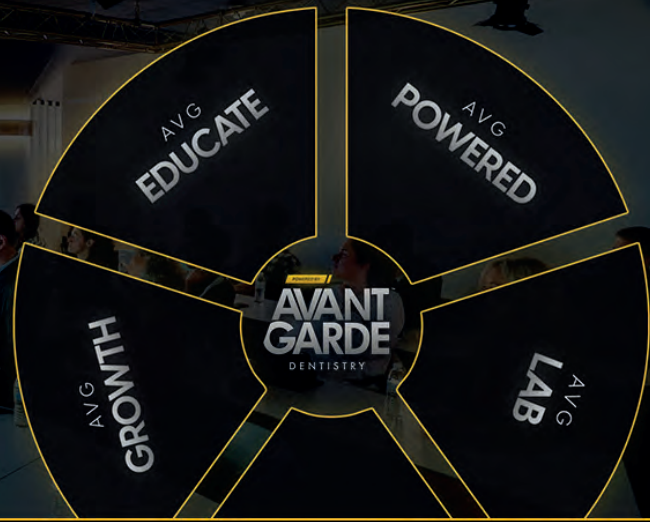
But it's also encouraging. Owners are asking better questions. And the best practices are learning that the next level isn't achieved by doing more dentistry. It's achieved by building a better business around the dentistry.

That's the river. The crossing is possible. And yes, your shoes will probably get wet.

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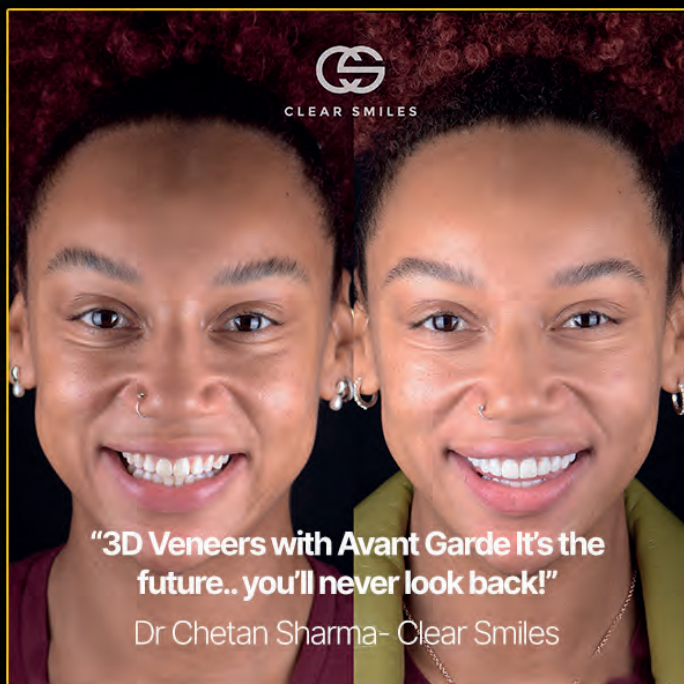


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# Woodberry Down

**Neil Shah** showcases Woodberry Down – a north London clinic that has grown from its NHS roots to a flourishing modern-day dental centre of excellence

**W**oodberry Down dental practice has cared for its local community for more than 40 years.

Located on one of the busiest main arterial routes through north London – Seven Sisters Road – it opened in 1983 as a small clinic focused on NHS services.

The practice was founded by the father of its current principal, Neil Shah, with a clear mission: to deliver reliable, high-quality dental care to everyone who walks through its doors.

Today, under Neil's leadership, that mission remains unchanged. The practice has been modernised and expanded to now offer private dental services in a beautifully renovated clinic. But its recent refurbishment is about more than just updated interiors.

With additional space came opportunities to install advanced technology and create a stronger team, elevating the clinic's service to new heights. Here, Neil shares his journey and how he continues to build on his father's legacy.

## NEIL'S STORY

I graduated from the University of Manchester in 2007, completing my foundational training in London. When I joined my father's practice as its principal in 2008, I was determined to

**WE OPTED FOR SOFT NEUTRALS, WOOD TEXTURES AND SOOTHING TONES TO REDUCE DENTAL ANXIETY, CREATE A WARM ATMOSPHERE AND REFLECT OUR BRAND VALUES OF TRUST, CARE AND EXCELLENCE**

## *Step inside...*

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Woodberry Down  
307 Seven Sisters Rd  
Woodberry Down  
London  
N4 1QR

**TELEPHONE**  
020 8800 2244

**WEBSITE**  
wddp.co.uk

build upon his legacy and transform it into a modern, patient-centred and forward-thinking dental clinic.

At the time, it was a three-surgery, mainly NHS-focused business, with only two surgeries fully in use. The building itself was dated, and although the practice provided good care, I could see potential for growth, innovation and a more contemporary approach to the patient experience.

My primary focus was to modernise workflows, ensure compliance and embrace digital technology while expanding our private services. So, the first step I took was to update the practice infrastructure: digitalising records, introducing robust computer systems and transitioning towards a paperless environment. We also invested in a CQC-compliant decontamination suite. These foundational changes laid the groundwork for our subsequent development.

## FORM AND FUNCTION

One of the most significant milestones in our journey was securing planning permission in 2020 to extend the practice from three to six surgeries. This allowed us to reimagine our practice design and create a space that truly reflected the quality of care we provide.

Among the key design features is a dedicated call handlers' room that

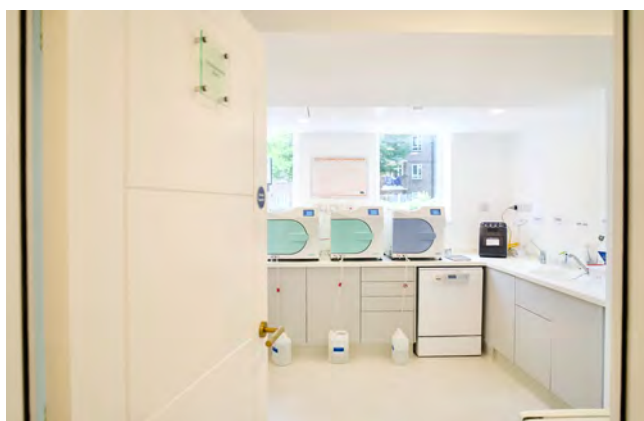
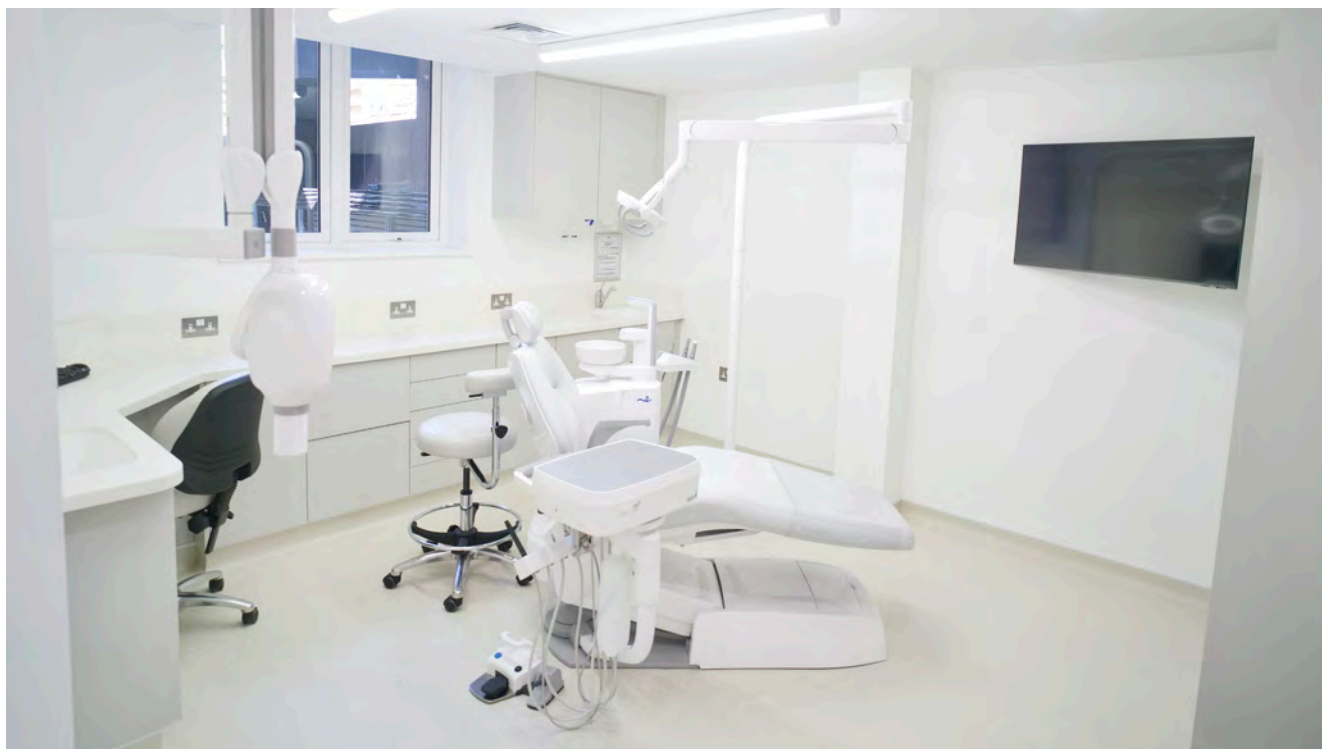




## *The ethos*

Woodberry Down is committed to delivering high-quality, patient-centred dental care rooted in a history of trust, innovation and community involvement. Established over 40 years ago with a mission to serve everyone, the practice has evolved into a modern centre of excellence, emphasising clinical quality, digital innovation, and a wide array of treatments. Its ethos centres on creating a welcoming, calming environment where patients feel valued and cared for, with a focus on preventive care and minimally invasive procedures.





ensures patient calls are managed privately and without distraction, freeing reception to focus on face-to-face care.

We also created a treatment coordinator room, providing a comfortable and confidential space for patients to discuss treatment plans and finance options.

We installed state-of-the-art Belmont treatment centres in every surgery, designed to promote patient comfort and an ergonomic workflow. Additionally, our new CBCT imaging suite has been a game-changer.

The fresh design, which meets the latest accessibility standards for people with disabilities, is not only functional but also aesthetically inspiring.

Business growth followed on from these improvements, and we diversified our services beyond NHS dentistry, steadily expanding private treatment options. As patient demand increased, turnover rates rose significantly.

Today, the practice is a thriving, predominantly private, dental centre of excellence. It boasts an expanded team of 18 highly skilled clinicians – including associates, hygienists/therapists, dental nurses, a treatment coordinator, call handlers, and management and a growing reputation within the community.

### **WELCOMING, PROFESSIONAL AND MODERN**

This latest refurbishment reflects 21st-century expectations, featuring light-filled surgeries, digital dentistry and a seamless patient journey.

We collaborated with an architect and interior designer, drawing inspiration from luxurious residential design, such as the recently built Berkeley Homes opposite us. Our aim was to create a space that felt more like a boutique hotel or spa than a dental clinic. It is filled with natural light, features calming interiors and has a carefully considered workflow.

Our goal was to reduce stress for both patients and staff, creating an environment that feels welcoming, professional and modern. We opted for soft neutrals, wood textures and soothing tones to reduce dental anxiety, create a warm



## *The team*

**PRACTICE PRINCIPAL**  
Neil Shah

**PRACTICE MANAGER**  
Deborah Henry

atmosphere and reflect our brand values of trust, care and excellence.

We installed Belmont Eurus S6 and S8 treatment centres for their ergonomic design, reliability and comfort, which also complement the aesthetics of our interiors.

We have also updated our website. It's now patient-friendly, modern and aligns with our brand values. Alongside this, we developed a dedicated recruitment website ([www.wddpjobs.co.uk](http://www.wddpjobs.co.uk)) to overcome nationwide difficulties in recruitment.

### **MISSION ACCOMPLISHED**

For anyone looking to refurbish a practice, plan meticulously, allow for contingencies, and work with professionals who are knowledgeable in healthcare compliance. Involve team members early, as their insights are invaluable for workflow design.

The transformation of our practice has been a journey of persistence, vision and teamwork. Through investment in our people, facilities and the patient journey, we have created a practice that not only meets but exceeds expectations.

My father's mission was always to provide accessible,

high-quality care to the local community. I have honoured this, while at the same time innovating in private dentistry. I lead with a focus on patient experience and staff development, ensuring the practice remains both caring and forward-thinking.

Now, our six-surgery expansion enables the addition of new associates and services as demand increases, and ongoing staff development will ensure we remain at the forefront of cutting-edge dental delivery while retaining our caring ethos.

---

## *Who was involved?*

**Architect**  
Bellis Architect

**Design**  
KTM Design

**Builders and fitters**  
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# Strategies for effective practice marketing

**Harminster Sidhu** examines marketing approaches that can be employed to successfully promote the dental practice and attract new patients



**A**fter years of hard work, five years at university, followed by honing your skills in practice, you finally take the leap and set up your own dental practice.

The journey doesn't stop there; you spend countless hours choosing the right location, hiring a great team, designing an inviting space, and investing in high-quality dental equipment, all while making a significant financial investment.

But once everything is in place, a new challenge emerges: how do you attract patients to your practice? What marketing strategies will help build your brand, increase visibility, and ultimately drive sales?

In this article, we'll explore effective marketing strategies that you can employ to effectively promote the practice and attract new patients.

Marketing a dental practice requires a strategic approach, combining long-term brand positioning with short-term marketing campaigns. Combining a well-structured marketing plan alongside excellent customer service and delivery of results ensures a steady stream of new patients while reinforcing loyalty among existing ones.

## WHY MARKETING MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

These days, patients are more informed about what's available to them than ever. Before they settle on a dental practice, they take the time to do their homework, browsing online, reading reviews, checking out

websites, and really getting a feel for whether a practice is the right fit for them. Once that choice is made, many patients remain loyal unless their expectations aren't met.

This change means that dental marketing isn't just about occasional promotions anymore; it's all about building trust from the very first interaction. Having a consistent and credible brand presence, both online and in the practice, helps patients feel secure in their decision and strengthens that trust long after their initial visit.

## ESTABLISHING YOUR MARKET POSITION

Effective marketing starts with a clear understanding of who you are, what you provide, and why patients should choose you over the competition. This foundational concept, known



**Harminster Sidhu**

Harminster is UK marketing manager at A-dec. For more details, visit [a-dec.com](http://a-dec.com).

as market positioning, shapes every message you send out.

A crucial aspect of this is defining your unique value proposition (UVP). Your UVP encapsulates what makes your practice stand out, whether it's cutting-edge technology, a patient-focused approach, flexible hours, specialised services, affordability, or a personalised patient experience.

When your UVP is well-defined, your messaging

becomes more cohesive and intentional.

Brand identity plays a vital role as well. This encompasses everything from your logo and colour scheme to the tone of your

communications and the vibe of your waiting area. Simple details, from a warm reception to refreshments while waiting, can make a lasting impression and elevate the patient experience.

A consistent and thoughtfully crafted brand not only fosters trust but also offers comfort, especially important in a field where many patients feel anxious.

Your website often serves as the first point of contact for potential patients. It should be professional, user-friendly, mobile-responsive, and packed with valuable information. A strong website clearly outlines your services, highlights your team, features high-quality photos, and includes patient testimonials. Search engine optimisation (SEO) is key to making sure prospective patients can easily find you.

Lastly, practice owners need to recognise marketing as a specialist area that requires dedicated time and expertise. With clinical and administrative responsibilities already filling much of the week, marketing can easily be deprioritised. However, as a key driver of business growth, it's an area worth investing in professionally. Whether that's employing an experienced marketing professional or partnering with external specialists for areas such as website management, SEO, or social media, having the right expertise in place helps ensure marketing activity

remains consistent, effective, and aligned with the long-term vision of the practice.

### BUILDING VISIBILITY THROUGH STRATEGIC CAMPAIGNS

Once you've laid down the foundations of your brand, it's time to shine a spotlight on your practice. Marketing really hits the mark when it's diverse, consistent, and blends

digital strategies with community involvement.

A well-thought-out launch, whether you're starting a new practice or rebranding, can create valuable early visibility.

Simple actions like distributing leaflets,

getting featured in local newspapers, or having short interviews on local radio can help you establish your presence. Hosting an open day allows potential patients to meet the team and get a feel for the environment, which can ease any uncertainties they might have.

Engaging with the community further solidifies your presence. Partnering with gyms, beauty salons, wellness centres, schools, and other local businesses can expand your reach and highlight your commitment to the community. Cross-promotions and oral health awareness events also open doors for new patient referrals.

Another effective way to attract patients is through a structured referral programme. Since word of mouth is one of the strongest marketing tools in dentistry, rewarding patients who refer others can significantly increase your new patient numbers while also fostering loyalty among your current ones. Make sure your team knows how to introduce and promote the programme in a natural way.

Managing your online reputation is just as crucial. Google reviews play a big role in influencing potential patients, so encourage happy patients to share their feedback. Responding quickly and professionally to any negative comments shows accountability and helps maintain trust.

## MARKETING REALLY HITS THE MARK WHEN IT'S DIVERSE, CONSISTENT, AND BLENDS DIGITAL STRATEGIES WITH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT



A solid online reputation can also boost your ranking in local search results.

### BUILDING A DIGITAL PRESENCE THAT WORKS

In today's world, digital marketing is essential. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook and TikTok give you the chance to showcase your skills, share valuable educational content, highlight patient treatment stories (with their permission, of course), and offer a sneak peek behind the scenes.

This approach adds a personal touch to your practice and helps solidify your brand identity. By consistently posting, using high-quality images, and maintaining a friendly, informative tone, you can foster engagement and boost awareness.

Paid advertising options, like Google Ads and targeted social media campaigns, can take your visibility to the next level by connecting you with the right audience just when they're looking for a new dentist.

Marketing your dental practice isn't a one-time effort; it's an ongoing journey. Successful practices recognise the value of brand visibility, patient interaction, and regular communication. By blending a solid foundational strategy with smart digital and community outreach, you can create a trusted presence that not only attracts new patients but also builds lasting loyalty.

With the right approach, you can elevate your practice from just a dental practice space to a vibrant, patient-focused brand that's truly part of your community.



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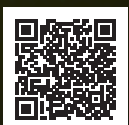
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# Capturing attention

Marketing is competitive. **Derek Uittenbroek** shares 10 ways to stand out in a noisy digital landscape

**W**hen it comes to dental marketing, the real competition isn't the dentist down the road – it's whatever causes

your audience to pause searches. Modern consumers are not just seeking information; they're scrolling for entertainment, emotional gratification and perhaps even a bit of an escape. That cat video? It's competing for the same few seconds of attention you want for your dental clinic's Instagram post, website ad or appointment reminder.

You occupy the same feed as all the other things your potential patients care about, so posts must feel relevant, emotive and specific. That's why content must stand out to cut through the plethora of 'noise'. And you have very little time to resonate. If we accept that cute pet reels that go viral attract more engagement than a post about gum disease, how do dental clinics capture the attention of potential patients in a world full of distractions?

Generally, social media posts follow the 'edu-tainment' principle – balancing engagement and information. A 2022 study from KCL revealed that 60% of those surveyed believed that having information at their fingertips helped them find solutions to problems, including dental care. This means dentists must find innovative ways to capture attention.

Consistency is important, but increasing output alone is not enough. True success lies in the delivery of quality and meaningful content. Leading clinics typically avoid outsourcing their 'voice' or using generic images and messaging. Instead, they develop in-house with clarity and a clear commercial purpose.



**Derek Uittenbroek**

Derek is founder and CEO of Ignite Growth. Follow him at @derekignite.

## MAKING AN IMPACT: TOP TIPS

**1. Know your perfect patient.** Who is your 'perfect patient'? Start by getting specific about one person – not 'anyone who needs Invisalign', but an actual person with a story. What triggered them to start treatment, what was at stake for them if they did nothing, what did they value most, and what false beliefs may have held them back? When you understand that level of detail, your content will resonate and start pulling in the right people.

**2. Stay relevant.** This isn't just about offering great treatments. It's about consistently communicating your value to your audience. Many clinics fall into the trap of sporadic content creation, lacking consistency and strategy. Regular content shoots should be non-negotiable because it demonstrates your expertise and showcases your knowledge and skills. It builds trust, reassuring patients you're active and reliable and keeps you at the forefront of potential patients' minds.

**3. Keep it fresh.** Don't let your content go stale by repeatedly reusing duplicate images and posts. Your goal should be to create a steady stream of fresh, engaging content that keeps your audience informed and interested. Your online presence is often the first impression potential patients have of your clinic, so make it count.

**4. Show personality.** Consider your content not a dental ad but a mini-showcase of your clinic. Show your team interacting or even reacting to memes. Share new team members, skills and equipment as they happen. All of this helps to showcase growth.

**5. Be visually scroll-stopping.** Use bold colours, clear images and include faces – remember, people connect with, and buy from, people.

**6. Tell stories.** Share patient success stories (with their written consent), transformations or even your personal 'why' as a dentist. Storytelling can build a connection with patients and make your services more appealing compared to purely entertaining online videos.

**7. Be authentic.** Focus on evidence-based strategies. It's essential to demonstrate a genuine in-chair experience, as authentic engagement and real patient stories greatly influence brand perception and loyalty.

**8. Harness trends.** Short-form video offers a perfect opportunity to relay bite-sized chunks of information, including quick tips and debunked myths. Engaging with popular trends, such as warning about poor treatment or product advice from so-called experts, highlighting the dangers of 'Turkey' teeth, or commenting on celebrity smiles, provides value.

**9. Build a brand.** Direct response marketing (offers, campaigns, open days) gives you spikes in growth, but these can drop off the moment you switch it off. Your brand, on the other hand, is sticky. It builds over time, planting seeds with those who aren't ready to buy yet. This is especially true in times of uncertainty, when people tend to gravitate towards what is familiar, safe and reputable.

**10. Gain trust.** Trust transforms the relationship between clinics and their patients. By sharing authentic success stories, clinics can strengthen their credibility and draw in new patients more effectively. Avoid unprofessional marketing tactics that can undermine your reputation.

*For references, email  
siobhan.hiscott@fmc.co.uk.*



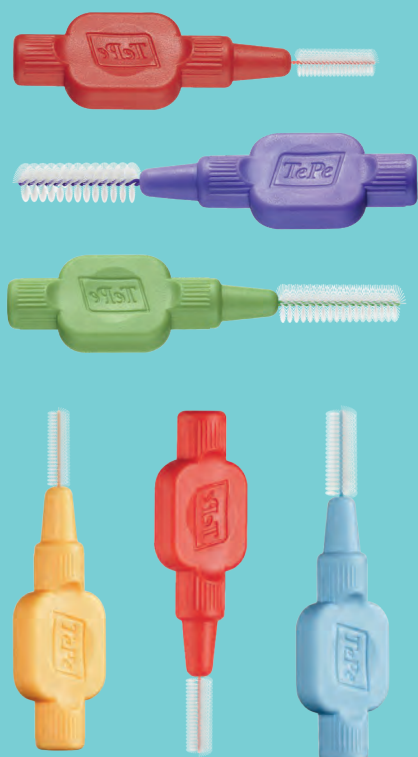


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# Tax year-end planning

**Iain Stevenson** provides a strategic checklist for dental practice owners

**A**s the end of the tax year approaches, many dental practice owners will be focused on clinical performance, patient numbers and staffing pressures. Yet one of the most effective ways to improve profitability often happens behind the scenes – through strategic tax planning. For dental businesses, year-end planning isn't about avoiding tax. It's about making use of allowances that can help you protect cash flow, reinvest in your practice and keep more of what you earn.

And with further tax changes on the horizon, taking action before the end of the 2025 tax year could make a meaningful difference to both your business and personal finances.

Tax treatment depends on individual circumstances and may be subject to change in future.

## PENSION CONTRIBUTIONS: AN OVERLOOKED BUSINESS TOOL

Pensions are often viewed as a personal savings vehicle, but they can also be a powerful planning tool for practice owners. This is because contributions benefit from tax relief and can often be paid directly from company profits.

The annual allowance currently sits at £60,000. Importantly, unused allowances from the previous three tax years can be carried forward. This creates a valuable opportunity for owners with retained profits to make significant, tax-efficient contributions.

For limited company owners, employer pension contributions are particularly attractive because they're treated as a business expense, reducing corporation tax while moving money out of the company in a tax-efficient way. This can

be more effective than taking profits as salary or dividends alone.

Dentists contributing to the NHS Pension Scheme face additional complexity. The figure tested against the annual allowance is not the amount paid in, but a calculated 'growth' figure based on actuarial assumptions. This can result in unexpected tax charges, which is why specialist advice is especially important when balancing NHS and private income.

## USING ISAS TO MANAGE SURPLUS INCOME

While pensions are focused on long-term planning, ISAs offer greater flexibility. You can invest up to £20,000 per tax year, with all growth and withdrawals free from income and capital gains tax (CGT).

For practice owners with surplus personal funds, ISAs can play an important role in smoothing income and managing future tax exposure. Unlike pensions, ISA allowances cannot be carried forward. Once the tax year ends, the allowance is lost.

Looking ahead, changes from April 2027 will cap cash ISA contributions at £12,000 for those under 65, increasing the importance of using allowances effectively while they remain available.

Remember that the value of your investments can go down as well as up, and you may get back less than you put in.

## DIVIDENDS, REMUNERATION AND PROFIT EXTRACTION

For incorporated dental practices, how profits are taken can be just as important as how they're generated. Dividends remain a common option for directors, with the first £500 currently tax-free. However, dividend tax rates are set to rise by 2% from April 2026, making this an area worth reviewing.

A well-balanced mix of salary, dividends and employer pension

contributions can help reduce overall tax across corporation tax, income tax and national insurance.

In many cases, directing profits into pensions before taking personal income can significantly improve efficiency, particularly for higher earners.

## CHARITABLE GIVING AND WIDER PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Charitable donations can also support tax planning.

For higher-earning dentists, Gift Aid contributions may help reduce taxable income below key thresholds, including the level at which the personal allowance starts to taper.

With further measures announced in the autumn budget (such as rising dividend taxes, future ISA changes and the proposed 'mansion tax' from 2028), the direction of travel is clear. Dental practices are likely to face increasing financial pressure, making efficient planning more important than ever.

## STAYING ONE STEP AHEAD

Tax year-end planning shouldn't be a box-ticking exercise. For dental practice owners, it's a strategic opportunity to protect profits, strengthen long-term financial resilience and prepare for future change.

Getting in touch with specialist financial advisers who understand the challenges of dentistry can unlock efficiencies that generic advice may overlook. In a climate of rising costs and ongoing regulatory change, staying one step ahead of the tax year end could be one of the most commercially valuable decisions you make.



**Iain Stevenson**

Iain is head of dental at Wesleyan Financial Services, leading a team of dental specialist financial advisers across the UK.

*For more information, call Wesleyan Financial Services on 0808 149 9416 or visit [wesleyan.co.uk/dental](https://www.wesleyan.co.uk/dental). Charges may apply. You will not be charged until the services required and the associated costs have been agreed.*

# Offering patient finance: cardinal rules

**Shelley Clegg** shares guidance on how to ensure you stay within the rules when offering your patients the chance to spread the cost of their treatment

**F**rom a patient's perspective, being able to take advantage of finance opens the door to treatments they may not have been able to afford without it. By giving them the opportunity to spread the cost of treatment over a number of months interest free, it helps overcome the issue of cost versus affordability.

By offering finance, rather than having to worry about covering the total cost of the treatment, they need only be concerned about affording the monthly payments. As long as they can manage those, then previously unaffordable treatments become affordable and within their reach.

From the practice's point of view, patient finance can benefit the business by helping to improve cash flow, reducing admin time and offering a competitive advantage over practices who don't offer finance. In many cases, patients can sign up for credit there and then which can also increase treatment plan uptake.



**Shelley Clegg**

Shelley is business development manager at Medenta. Medenta has been supporting dental practices since 2004 with finance solutions that help patients to say 'yes' to the treatment they want.

## APPOINTED REPRESENTATIVE OR AN INTRODUCER APPOINTED REPRESENTATIVE?

As it's a financial service, patient finance is regulated. This means there are some strict rules and regulations regarding what you can and can't do when it comes to the way you offer patient finance.

So, are you an appointed representative (AR) or an introducer appointed representative (IAR)? 'What's in a name?' you might ask. 'A huge difference between what you are and are not allowed to do' is the answer in this case!

### Appointed representative

An AR is allowed to carry out credit broking services under the supervision of a principal firm that is directly authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). This allows you to fully integrate patient finance into your dental practice.

As an AR, your team will be able to discuss finance products in detail with patients, offer access to different lenders (as long as your principal agrees) and help patients to complete financial applications.

Possibly the most advantageous aspect of being an AR is being allowed to advertise the fact that your practice offers finance.

### Introducer appointed representative

On the other hand, as an IAR you are only allowed to provide generic information on finance products and merely signpost patients to the appropriate provider.

Importantly, you would not be allowed to discuss specific products with patients, help them complete finance applications nor discuss the suitability of finance products.

Being an IAR is great if you want a hands-off approach to offering finance. However, if you want to be able to talk patients through their options and help them with their applications, this may not be the right option for you.

Medenta can support your practice in becoming an AR and help ensure your team is fully trained, compliant and ready to offer regulated finance activities in-house.

If you'd like to know more about the two types of representatives, read the blog – 'Are you confidently and compliantly offering patient finance for your current FCA status?' – on the Medenta website.







### **PRICING – ONE RULE FOR EVERYONE**

Regardless of your status, there are certain rules that are common to both types of representatives. One of them refers to two-tier pricing.

This means there should be no difference in the cost of treatment regardless of how your patients pay. For example, if you offer patients a discount on a treatment if they pay up front, then you should offer that same discount if they choose to use finance for it.

The regulations state that the final price for any treatment must be the same. This doesn't prevent you from offering discounts at all. However, they must be applied across the board, regardless of how the patient is paying.

### **SUBSIDY CHARGES CAN'T BE PASSED ON TO THE PATIENT**

If your dental practice is offering finance, then you are acting as a credit broker, and the credit provider will be charging you an admin or subsidy charge.

As the business providing this finance option, it's your responsibility to pay any subsidy charges or administration fees. These are not costs you can legally pass onto the patient.

These finance costs need to be viewed in the same way as any other business overheads, such as electricity and staff salaries. That's why it's important to ensure that your treatment pricing structure takes into account all your practice costs, including fees such as these.

### **AVOID HOT WATER BY STICKING TO THE FACTS**

Ensure that your team members understand their limits when introducing patient finance into their conversations with patients.

If you want to avoid getting into hot water with the FCA, the team needs to understand whether your practice is an AR or IAR.

## **BY STICKING TO THE FACTS, YOU CAN STILL HELP YOUR PATIENTS WITHOUT BREAKING ANY RULES**

To be able to talk in detail and give guidance on products, you need to have the relevant regulatory permissions or qualifications.

However, whether you're an AR or IAR, you can talk facts. By sticking to the facts and staying away from guiding patients, you can still help your patients without breaking any rules.

Patient finance can be a great addition to a practice's service offering. However, unless you get the appropriate help and guidance it's easy to fall foul of the regulations, which can prove costly.

If you're looking to introduce patient finance, then it's wise to speak to a firm like Medenta that can help guide you safely and compliantly through the process.

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1. BOCOUTURE Summary of Product Characteristics. Merz Pharmaceuticals GmbH:  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/600/smpc> (Last accessed January 2026).

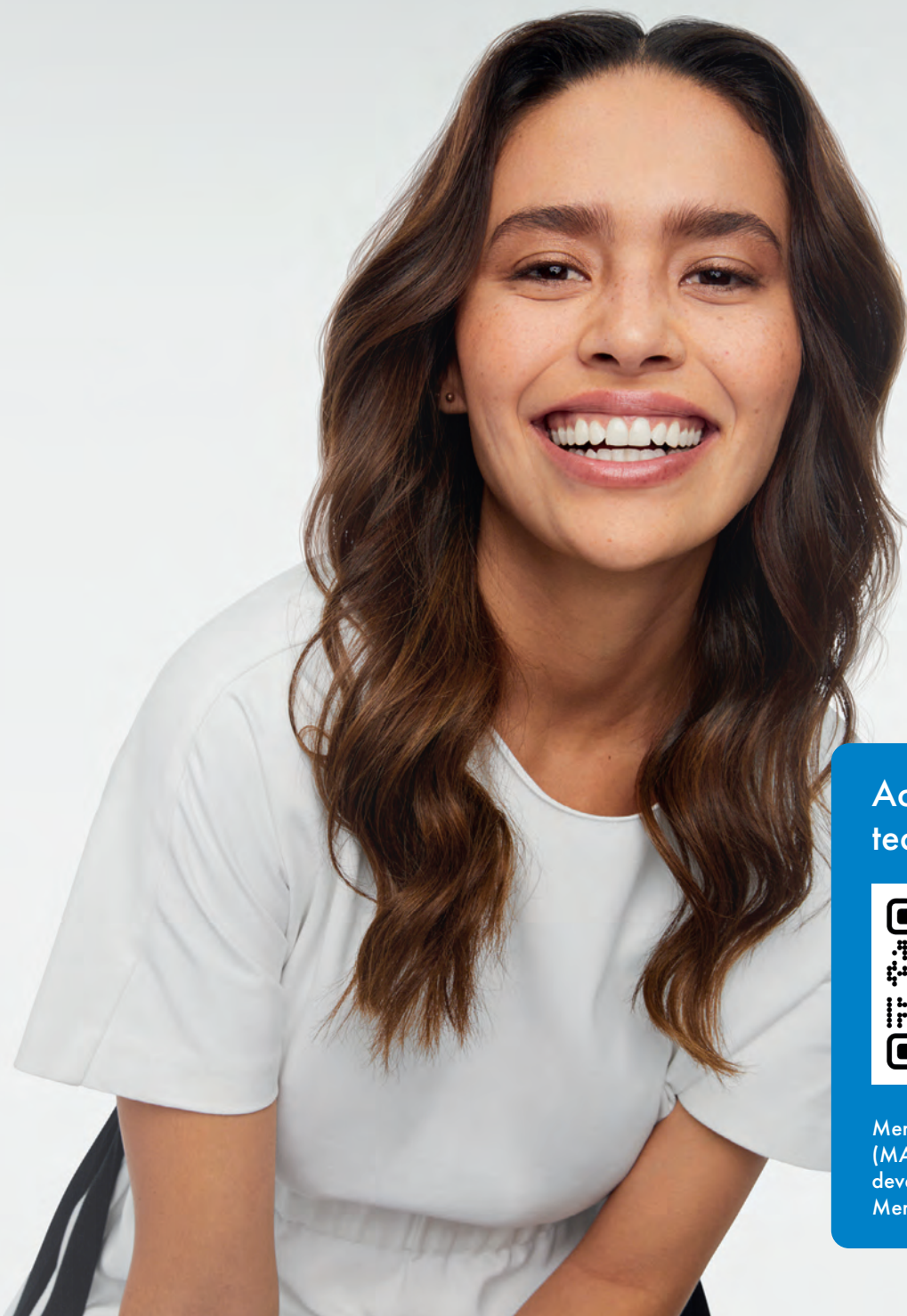
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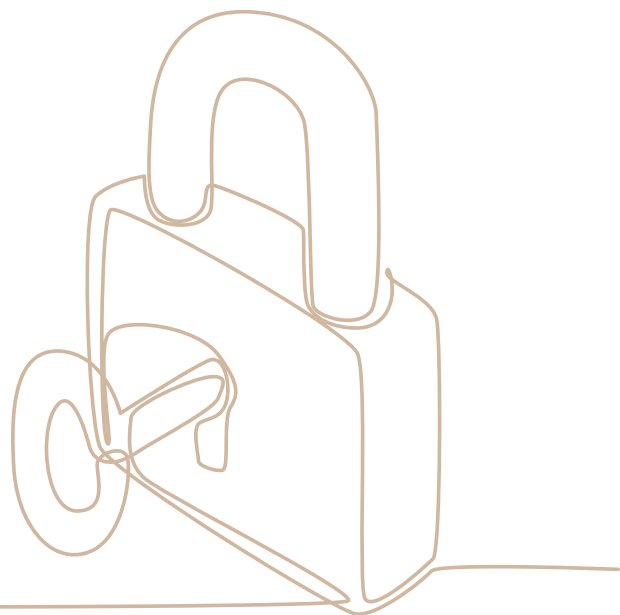
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# Unlocking team potential

How do you motivate the team to take ownership and accountability, asks **Amanda Reast**



**W**hether you are running a dental practice, leading a team or mentoring, one of the simplest yet most powerful coaching tools at your fingertips is the goals, reality, options and way forward (GROW) model. Using it well allows team members to visualise how they will reach a goal.

This article explores how to fully leverage the GROW model to drive clarity, confidence and ownership within the team.

## HOW TO GROW EFFECTIVELY

### 1. Goals

The first part of the GROW model is goals. Start by asking: 'What do you want to achieve?'

Encourage specific and meaningful goals, short- to long-term, the big picture. Link each team member's goal to the wider team or business objectives to ensure relevance and support and create stronger motivation.

My go-to question at the end of this part is: 'What would success look like here?'. Get them to score that on a scale of one to 10.



**Amanda Reast**

Amanda is business manager at The Dental Architect. She is a chartered manager, an accredited member of the Institute of Consulting and is working towards chartered consultancy. Amanda is also a board member for the Chartered Management Institute, and completed a postgraduate diploma in clinical education, coaching and mentoring. Amanda won Practice Manager of the Year at the 2024 Private Dentistry Awards and the 2025 Dentistry Awards.

### 2. Reality

The second part of the model is reality. Ask: 'Where are you now in relation to this goal?'. Help the team reflect honestly, without judgment.

Use this stage to identify potential barriers, blind spots and strengths. Get curious not critical.

## Five ways to grow

1. Use the GROW model in one-to-ones as well as formal coaching. It is a conversation tool, not just part of a framework
2. Keep questions open-ended and let your team do the thinking
3. Do not rush the reality phase as this is where insight and ownership start
4. Link the 'goal' to personal and team purpose as motivation goes deeper when it is connected
5. Document actions and revisit together. Growth happens when coaching becomes continuous and is powerful when progress can be seen by the individual.

My go-to question is: 'What is happening now that makes achieving this a challenge?'. Once you know the answer, ask: 'What is the impact on your work/team?'.

### 3. Options

For the next part – options – explore strategies. Ask: 'What could you do to improve XYZ?' – after they answer, clarify – 'Anything else?'. Push for creativity and variety.

Do not jump into telling, let the team member generate at least three options themselves before offering your input. My go-to question at the end is: 'If you had to try one thing this week, what would it be?'.

### 4. Way forward

Finally, way forward. For this last part of the GROW model, ask: 'What will you do? When? What support do you need?'. This helps turn ideas into action. My tip here is to get a specific commitment with a timeline as accountability. At this stage, my go-to question is: 'What could get in the way?'.

Agree on a timeframe and check how realistic that is based on the team member's current workload.

When used well, the GROW model creates confident, capable and reflective team members, not just tasks ticked, and that is exactly what is needed in high-performing practices.

*Get in touch with Amanda at [manager@thedentalarchitect.com](mailto:manager@thedentalarchitect.com) or visit [thedentalarchitectacademy.com](http://thedentalarchitectacademy.com).*



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1. Bosma, M.L., McGuire, J.A., DelSasso, A. et al. Efficacy of flossing and mouth rinsing regimens on plaque and gingivitis: a randomized clinical trial. BMC Oral Health 24, 178 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12903-024-03924-4> 2. Araujo MWB, Charles CA, Weinstein RB, McGuire JA, Parikh-Das AM, Du Q, Zhang J, Berlin JA, Gunsolley JC. Meta-analysis of the effect of an essential oil-containing mouthrinse on gingivitis and plaque. J Am Dent Assoc. 2015;146(8):610-622. doi:10.1016/j.adaj.2015.02.011 3. EFP: Guidelines for effective prevention of periodontal diseases (2014). Available at: <https://www.efp.org/news-events/perio-workshop/past-workshops/perio-workshop-2014/>



# Dominic Hassall

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# The personalised approach

In a new five-part series, **Sarika Shah** explores how and why partnership is key to success

**D**entistry is evolving – fast. The expectations of our patients have shifted, the way we practise dentistry is changing, and as clinicians we’re being pulled in more directions than ever before. In this climate, the dentists who thrive aren’t the ones who simply ‘treat teeth’. They’re the ones who build partnerships.

Partnership, to me, is the heart of personalised care. After more than 20 years as a clinician, a practice owner and now a mindset and performance coach, one truth has become crystal clear: when we step away from a transactional model of dentistry and into a relational one, everything improves:

- Clinical results
- Patient satisfaction
- Case acceptance
- Team harmony
- Your own fulfilment and confidence.

This new series for *Private Dentistry* will reveal how to build a personalised, partnership-based approach to care that works for both you and your patients. But before we dive into the ‘how’, let’s explore why it matters.

## WHY PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

Today’s patients are not passive recipients of care. They are emotionally driven, highly informed, consumer-minded, and often more anxious than ever. They want to feel heard. They want to feel involved. And they want to feel safe before they even think about saying yes to treatment.

When patients feel like a partner and not a passenger on the journey, something shifts. They trust you faster, they communicate openly, they are

more invested in the outcome and they take ownership of their oral health.

You’ll find that treatment becomes collaborative rather than resistant and that decisions become easier for both sides. Perhaps most importantly, partnership brings meaning back into dentistry – because the work becomes about people, not procedures.

## CREATING ‘THE PERFECT RESULT’

It’s tempting to think perfect results are all about clinical skill. While skill is essential, in a real-world practice setting, outcomes are shaped by far more than the dentist’s hands.

Let’s explore what great dentistry requires today.

### 1. A shared vision

When the dentist and patient are aligned on the ‘why’ and the ‘what’, success becomes a joint endeavour.

## Benefits of a personalised approach

- Better experiences: patients feel seen, not processed. This alone increases trust and loyalty
- Better compliance: when treatment plans align with a patient’s values, lifestyle and goals, commitment becomes easier
- Better clinical outcomes: healthy relationships create healthier mouths
- Better working days: when you work with patients, dentistry becomes lighter, smoother and more rewarding
- Better practice growth: partnership is memorable. The way you make patients feel becomes the story they share with others.

When they’re misaligned, even clinically excellent work can feel like failure.

### 2. Emotional safety

Patients make decisions based on how they feel, not what they understand. If they feel rushed, judged, confused or dismissed, everything becomes harder.

### 3. Honest communication

This means holding space for concerns, asking better questions, and making sure the patient’s story – not just their symptoms – is heard.

### 4. Empowered participation

A personalised approach invites patients to take responsibility. They leave feeling confident, respected and informed – not overwhelmed or pressured.

### 5. A dentist who leads with presence, not performance

When we self-lead – regulate our emotions, stay grounded and show up intentionally – we bring clarity, empathy and professionalism into every interaction. When all these elements align, dentistry becomes a co-created journey.

## THE FUTURE OF DENTISTRY

Modern dentistry is about relational mastery. A personalised, partnership-based approach isn’t a luxury, but the differentiator in a system where patients have options, opinions and comparison points.

Partnership is the future of dentistry and it has the power to transform the way we practise and the way we feel about our work. And when we get that right, everything else follows.

*Part two of this series will explore how to break patient anxieties down and create emotional safety.*



**Dr Sarika Shah**

Sarika is a dentist, practice principal, mindset and leadership coach, as well as founder of Flourish as a Female.

# Reimagining the patient journey

**Barry Oulton** explains how to craft a patient journey that drives loyalty and elevates the practice

In dentistry, it's not just clinical skills that set a practice apart, it's the experience patients have at every touchpoint. From the first phone call to post-treatment follow-ups, the patient journey is your opportunity to create a lasting impression that builds trust, loyalty, and referrals.

Reimagining the patient journey isn't just about streamlining processes; it's about humanising every interaction and ensuring patients feel valued, understood and cared for.

Let's explore how to craft a patient journey that drives loyalty and elevates your practice.

## THE PATIENT JOURNEY

The patient journey encompasses every interaction a patient has with your practice, starting with their first enquiry and continuing through treatment and beyond. It includes both tangible elements (like appointment scheduling) and intangible factors (like how a patient feels during their visit).

When every step of this journey is thoughtful and patient-focused, it transforms routine care into an exceptional experience that patients remember and talk about.

Today's patients have more options than ever. So, to stand out, your practice must go beyond providing excellent clinical care; you need to deliver an unparalleled experience.

A well-crafted patient journey:

- Builds trust: patients are more likely to accept treatment when they feel confident in your care

- Increases retention: satisfied patients return for ongoing care and treatment
- Drives referrals: positive experiences turn patients into advocates who recommend your practice to others.

## KEY COMPONENTS OF AN EXCEPTIONAL PATIENT JOURNEY

To create loyalty through the patient journey, focus on these three essential elements:

1. Personalised communication
2. Seamless processes
3. Emotional connection.

### 1. Personalised communication

Patients want to feel seen and heard. Personalised communication ensures that every patient interaction feels tailored to their needs. Try the following:

- Active listening: take the time to understand each patient's concerns and goals
- Tailored explanations: adapt your communication style to match the patient's preferences, whether they prefer detailed explanations or big picture summaries
- Follow-ups: send personalised messages after treatment to check in on their wellbeing and reinforce your commitment to their care.

### 2. Seamless processes

A smooth, hassle-free experience is critical to patient satisfaction. Tips to streamline your processes to ensure that patients feel cared for at every step include:

- Efficient scheduling: make appointment booking easy and accessible, whether through online tools or a responsive front desk team
- Minimise wait times: respect patients' time by keeping appointments

on schedule and communicating promptly about delays

- Transparent billing: clearly explain costs and payment options to avoid confusion or frustration.

### 3. Emotional connection

Beyond clinical care, building emotional connections with patients fosters trust and loyalty. To nurture the patient relationship, try the following:

- Empathy in action: acknowledge patients' fears or anxieties and reassure them with compassion
- Celebrate milestones: highlight achievements, such as improved oral health or completing a treatment plan
- Small gestures, big impact: simple touches like remembering a patient's name or preferences can make a world of difference.

## Crafting loyalty through care

- Personalise communication: adapt your approach to meet each patient's unique needs and preferences
- Streamline processes: ensure every interaction is smooth, efficient, and patient-focused
- Build emotional connections: foster trust and loyalty through empathy and personalised care
- Empower your team: align your team around a shared commitment to exceptional patient experiences
- Continuously improve: regularly assess and refine the patient journey to stay ahead of expectations.



**Barry Oulton**

Barry is a practising dentist and the founder of The Confident Dentist. He is a qualified coach and experienced trainer, certified in hypnotherapy and a master practitioner in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP).



## OVERCOMING COMMON CHALLENGES

Even with the best intentions, obstacles in the patient journey can arise. Here's how to address common challenges:

- Patient anxiety: train your team to recognise the signs and respond with empathy and reassurance
- Miscommunication: use clear, jargon-free language and confirm patients' understanding of treatment plans
- Inconsistent experiences: regularly evaluate and refine your processes to ensure consistency across all touchpoints.

**'PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID, PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU DID, BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL' – MAYA ANGELOU**

## TEAM EFFORT

Your team plays a pivotal role in delivering an exceptional patient journey. When everyone – from the front desk to the clinical team – is aligned and patient-focused, the experience becomes seamless and memorable.

The following can help to get the team fully on board:

- Empower your team: provide training on communication, empathy, and patient care to ensure everyone understands their impact on the patient journey
- Foster collaboration: encourage team members to share insights and ideas for improving patient experiences
- Celebrate successes: recognise and reward your team for their contributions to creating exceptional care.

## PRACTICAL STEPS

Ready to elevate the patient journey in your practice? Start with these actionable steps:

1. Map the journey: walk through your patient journey from start to finish, identifying areas for improvement

2. Seek feedback: actively solicit input from patients to understand their needs and experiences
3. Streamline systems: implement tools and processes that simplify scheduling, communication, and follow-ups
4. Prioritise training: equip your team with the skills and knowledge to deliver patient-focused care
5. Monitor and adjust: continuously evaluate your patient journey to ensure it meets and exceeds expectations.

Coaching can also enhance the patient journey. Through my coaching programmes, I help practice owners reimagine their patient journeys. We look at communication, process optimisation and team alignment and create systems and strategies that improve patient satisfaction and drive growth and loyalty.

By reimaging the patient journey, you can transform your practice into a place where patients feel valued, cared for, and eager to return. The result? A thriving practice built on trust, loyalty and exceptional care.

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# Understanding diversity and differences

By embracing diversity, you can create a welcoming and inclusive environment where patients feel valued and understood, say **Mervyn Druian** and **Bernita Shelley**

**U**nderstanding diversity is crucial for providing inclusive and effective care. We all need to embrace diversity and differences among patients and team members.

Everyone is unique, with different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs. By recognising and respecting these differences, you can provide more inclusive and personalised care. It is about treating each patient as an individual and tailoring your approach to meet their specific needs. It involves being open-minded, empathetic and culturally sensitive.

By embracing diversity, you can create a welcoming and inclusive environment where patients feel valued and understood. This will not only improve patient satisfaction, but will also enhance the overall quality of care provided.

## BROADENING YOUR HORIZONS: TOP TIPS

### Educate yourself and your team

Take the time to learn about

different cultures, backgrounds and perspectives. This can be done through reading, attending workshops or webinars, or engaging in conversations with individuals from diverse communities.

### Foster a welcoming environment

Create a safe and inclusive space for patients by ensuring your practice displays diversity in its décor, literature and imagery. Train your staff on cultural sensitivity and encourage respectful communication.

### Communicate effectively

Recognise that language barriers may exist and make efforts to bridge the gap. Provide translation services or have multilingual staff members available to assist patients.

Remember to use clear and simple language when explaining procedures or treatment options.

### Be mindful of cultural practices

Respect and accommodate cultural practices and beliefs that may impact treatment. For example, dietary restrictions or religious observances may need to be considered when planning appointments, or discussing treatment plans.

### Tailor your approach

Recognise that each patient is unique and may have different needs and preferences. Adapt your communication style, treatment

## BY RECOGNISING AND RESPECTING DIFFERENCES, YOU CAN PROVIDE MORE INCLUSIVE AND PERSONALISED CARE

plans and techniques to meet their individual requirements.

Listen mindfully and be responsive to patient concerns.

### Seek diverse perspectives

Surround yourself with a diverse team of colleagues and mentors who can provide different viewpoints and insights. Engage in discussions and collaborate with others to broaden your understanding of diversity.

### EVOLVE AND GROW

Remember, promoting diversity and inclusivity is an ongoing process that will continue to change and evolve. Continuously evaluate your practices, seek feedback from patients, and be open to learning and growing.

By embracing diversity, you can create a more inclusive and compassionate practice.

*This article is taken from **Dream Believe Achieve**, a book on how to grow, progress and succeed in dentistry. Buy your copy at [dreambelieveachievesuccess.com](http://dreambelieveachievesuccess.com).*



**Mervyn Druian**

Mervyn is a cosmetic dentist, one of the founders of the British Dental Bleaching Society and the honoured international president of the Alpha Omega Dental Society. He is co-author of *Dream Believe Achieve*. For more details, email [contact@dba-success.co.uk](mailto:contact@dba-success.co.uk).



**Bernita Shelley**

Bernita is a dental hygienist, coach and artist who blends her love for oral health, personal development, and creativity to positively influence others. She is co-author of *Dream Believe Achieve*.



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# Fired up!

**Rana Al-Falaki** explains how to achieve more with less stress

**E**very January, millions set goals with enthusiasm, but according to Forbes, only 9% stick to them, and 43% give up before February.

The issue isn't lack of willpower; it's how most of us structure our goals. Traditional SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound) goals appeal to logic and discipline. They activate the left hemisphere of the brain, which is analytical, linear, and detail oriented.

This is helpful for short-term targets, but on its own it can block creativity, flow and motivation – all of which live in the right hemisphere. Without those, progress becomes mechanical, and energy drains fast. You can be efficient yet still feel unfulfilled.

## WHEN GOALS BECOME A SOURCE OF STRESS

As dental professionals, we're trained to plan, measure and perfect, which makes SMART thinking second nature.

But it's also what keeps many dental professionals trapped in cycles of overworking, over-analysing, and eventually, burning out.

This is exactly what I pointed out to Dr CS when she became so despondent in failing to stick to her resolutions

and each year the thoughts of change would repeat themselves, only to be lost and forgotten in the day-to-day grind.

Dr CS had always been the high-achieving associate – clinical precision, loyal patients and an enviable diary. Each January, she'd map out her goals: increase private conversions, improve efficiency, and finally make time for herself.

By March, however, that same diary felt suffocating. Treatments overran, staff looked to her for constant answers, and even her gym sessions felt like another task on a never-ending list.

'I'm exhausted,' she confessed during coaching. 'I'm doing everything right – I've set SMART goals, planned my week, but it still feels like I'm always chasing my tail and there aren't enough hours in the day'.

If this sounds familiar, then you're not alone.

## FROM SMART TO FIRE

The turning point for Dr CS came when I introduced her to the FIRE formula – a tool from the NAIL-IT leadership system that helps align goals with energy rather than obligation.

She smiled:

'You mean I can still achieve what I want, but feel good while doing it?' Exactly!

FIRE shifts focus from the external tick-box approach of SMART goals to an internal energy alignment model, integrating logic and intuition – the essence of optimal performance.

Here's how it works.

### 1. Feelings – the spark

Before you commit to any goal, ask:

- How does it make me feel?
- Is there excitement or dread?
- Does it energise you or feel like a 'should'?

Feelings are a powerful compass. When you listen to them, you activate the brain's reward system and build momentum naturally. When you ignore them, resistance builds and stress follows.

For Dr CS, the goal of 'increasing private revenue' felt heavy, rooted in expectation, not inspiration. But when reframed as 'building trust through high-value treatments that make a real difference', her energy shifted. The excitement returned.

### 2. Integrity – the core

Integrity asks: does this goal reflect who I truly am and what I stand for?

When goals align with your values and purpose, you access what I call flow energy – effort feels effortless.

For many clinicians, misalignment happens when goals are driven by external pressure: patient demand,



**Rana Al-Falaki**

Rana is an internationally acclaimed leader in dental wellbeing and leadership. As founder of NAIL-IT in Dentistry, she works with dentists to achieve optimal performance. The award-winning periodontist, coach, author and speaker blends over 25 years' experience with the NAIL-IT system. Visit [nailitindentistry.com](http://nailitindentistry.com) for details.



financial targets, or social comparison. Over time, that erodes authenticity and joy.

Dr CS realised her true value was connection, not volume. She began tracking how many patients completed treatment feeling genuinely informed and confident, rather than how many procedures she performed. The difference was immediate: fewer cancellations, higher case acceptance, and calmer days.

### 3. Relevance – the filter

Relevance brings perspective. How does your goal fit into the bigger picture of your life, your role and your wellbeing?

We often chase what's urgent over what's important. Yet not everything that demands our attention deserves our energy. By asking 'how relevant is this to who I want to become?', you prioritise purpose over pressure.

For Dr CS, that meant saying no to unnecessary administrative tasks and focusing her time on treatments and team communication that directly impacted patient outcomes. This single shift reduced her perceived stress by over 30% in self-reported wellbeing scores after three months.

### 4. Engagement – the flame

Finally, goals must engage you. If they're

too easy, your brain switches off; too hard, it freezes. The key is calibrated challenge – enough stretch to stay interested, enough realism to stay confident.

The neurochemical balance behind motivation depends on dopamine and noradrenaline levels. Moderate challenge keeps both in optimal range. Too much or too little leads to stress or apathy.

Dr CS broke her long-term goal of 'increasing private conversion by 20%' into micro-goals: mastering one advanced treatment protocol, redesigning her consultation process, and holding weekly debriefs with her nurse. Each milestone triggered satisfaction and kept her engaged.

### WHEN PERFORMANCE BECOMES OPTIMAL

By combining feelings, integrity, relevance and engagement, Dr CS discovered she could achieve more while working fewer hours.

She hadn't changed her workload, just her approach. She was no longer chasing outcomes; she was in flow with them.

This is optimal performance – the ability to self-regulate energy, maintain high standards, and feel fulfilled rather than fatigued. It's the foundation of the NAIL-IT leadership system, built around six pillars:

1. Needs – laying the foundations for success by ensuring your psychological and physical requirements are met
2. Attitude – cultivating growth and determination over perfection
3. Integrity – aligning who you are with your behaviour
4. Limitless – expanding beyond perceived boundaries and taking fearless action

5. Intuition – using gut insight alongside logic to make decisions

6. Tangibility – grounding vision into action and real outcomes.

Together, they transform performance from a cycle of strain into one of sustainable success.

### THE LEADERSHIP LESSON

Goal-setting is leadership in action. It directs energy, shapes decisions and models behaviour for your team.

When leaders operate from stress, they unconsciously transmit that stress. When they operate from alignment, they create safety, clarity and inspiration.

After embedding FIRE within her own routines, Dr CS began sharing it in morning huddles: 'What's one thing today that feels energising? One that aligns with our values? One that keeps us growing?'

Staff morale improved, communication softened, and her principal noticed smoother teamwork across the board. Burnout prevention had become culture creation.

### BEYOND THE MYTH OF BUSINESS

In dentistry, business is often mistaken for success. Yet true productivity isn't about doing more. It is about doing what matters most with energy that replenishes itself.

Optimal performers don't rely on adrenaline; they build systems that regenerate calm, clarity and creativity. That's the difference between high performance and sustainable performance, and between temporary motivation and lifelong mastery.

Next time you plan a goal – be it for your practice or yourself – don't just ask what you want to achieve. Ask how you want to feel along the way. Create an intention with energy flow, rather than a goal with a dead-end.

Put FIRE under your goals – feel them, live them with integrity, align them with relevance and stay engaged with curiosity and challenge.

When you combine logic with intuition, effort with ease and structure with soul, you don't just achieve more. You achieve it with less stress, greater joy and lasting success. Don't just be SMART. Be on FIRE!

## Tips to find your fire

- **Feelings:** before acting on any goal, pause and notice your emotional state. Excitement signals alignment; tension signals resistance
- **Integrity:** integrity fuels sustainability. When you act in alignment with your values, you don't have to push. Energy flows naturally
- **Relevance:** relevance frees energy. Delegate, automate, or delete anything that doesn't move you toward your true priorities
- **Engagement:** engagement equals energy in motion. Regular micro-wins sustain motivation far more than one distant goal.

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# The power of incentives

Whether it's cupcakes, vouchers or an air fryer, the right incentive can transform a passive team into go-getters and passionate promoters of your membership plan. **Selina Alexander** and **Louise Anderson** suggest ways to encourage team members to promote your plan and get patients to join

**A**s inflation and practice running costs continue to rise, a well-populated dental membership plan with its predictable monthly income, can help ease some of a practice owner's worries. As well as the income, plans also help encourage patient loyalty and regular attendance opening up further opportunities to generate revenue. That's why it's important to sign up as many patients as possible to become plan members.

In this article, Selina Alexander and Louise Anderson share their combined experience of more than 60 years in dentistry to suggest ways to encourage team members to promote your plan and get patients to join.

From cupcakes to air fryers and vouchers to spa days, incentives don't need to be extravagant – they just need to be meaningful. Pitched right, they can transform your team into enthusiastic ambassadors for your membership plan.

## WHY INCENTIVES WORK

During her working life, Selina has visited dozens of practices across the UK and has witnessed firsthand how small, thoughtful rewards can drive big results.

'An incentive doesn't always have to be monetary,' she explains. 'It can be time back, like a Friday afternoon off, or something fun like cupcakes when the team hits a milestone.'

One standout example she shares is of a practice in Belfast struggling to reach 1,000 patients. Selina asked each team member what would motivate them, the response was simple – an air fryer for the staff kitchen. The owner agreed, and within



**Selina Alexander**

Selina is a regional support manager at Practice Plan with three decades' experience in the dental industry. She began her career in dentistry as a trainee dental nurse and progressed to become regional manager for 10 practices, through to mergers and acquisitions manager.



**Louise Anderson**

Louise is a regional support manager at Practice Plan. She began her career as a dental nurse in 1991 and is also a qualified NVQ assessor. Before joining Practice Plan in 2022, she spent 15 years as a group manager for five dental practices in south west Wales.



months, the team hit its target.

'I messaged the owner in January this year and he had 1,004 patients. The air fryer was already in the car,' Selina laughs. 'The team was thrilled.'

The moral of this story? Ask team members what would give them an incentive to promote your plan more widely. Whether it's food, drink, time off or a new piece of equipment for the staff room, the right incentive can work wonders to motivate people.

### CHART YOUR PROGRESS

Another effective strategy is to break down big goals into more easily achieved steps.

If your ultimate aim is to add 2,000 new members to your plan, take it in stages. Reward team members when you hit 50 more, then 100, and so on until you reach your target.

Track your progress to keep people motivated. 'Seeing the numbers go up gives the team a sense of achievement,' says Selina. 'It's not just about hitting a huge target; it's also about celebrating the journey.'

Louise agrees. 'You need to track things,' she says. 'Even if it's just a poster in the staff room showing weekly sign-ups, it keeps the goal front and centre.'

### TEAM-BASED REWARDS WORK BEST

While offering individual incentives might seem appealing, they can sometimes be counterproductive. Encouraging patients to sign up is a whole team effort.

'I don't encourage top-seller rewards,' Louise explains. 'It can create resentment. If someone's on reception and signs up 10 patients, others might feel it's not worth trying as they don't have the same exposure to patients.'

Instead, focus on team-based incentives. Louise suggests starting with something simple like pizzas for lunch when the team hits 25 sign-ups. Then scale up: 'For 50 patients, maybe a £5 voucher each. For 100, a £10

voucher. It builds momentum.'

Vouchers are especially effective because they're flexible and personal. 'Cash is king again,' Louise notes.

'People appreciate something they can use how they want – whether it's groceries, a treat, or a gift.'

### TAILOR INCENTIVES TO THE TEAM

Not every team wants the same thing. Some love the idea of a spa day; others would rather not spend time with colleagues outside of work. That's why it's crucial to ask team members what would motivate them.

Louise has had these conversations with teams and found that

preferences vary widely. 'There's often two groups,' she says. 'Some want experiences, others want practical rewards. If you go with something like a team night out, you risk alienating those who can't

or don't want to attend.'

Instead, choose incentives that are inclusive and easy to distribute. Vouchers, time off, or shared treats like lunch or snacks tend to work well across the board.

### ACHIEVING POSITIVE RESULTS

Both Selina and Louise emphasise the importance of refresher training alongside incentives. 'I've done 27 refresher trainings this past year,' Selina shares. 'It gives teams a boost and reminds them why the membership plan matters.'

Louise adds that after training, there's often a spike in sign-ups. However, activity can drop off if the team isn't continually engaged. That's where incentives come in. 'Training gets them started, but incentives keep them going.'



### OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

Sometimes, the challenge is more to do with mindset than motivation. Selina recalls working with a practice where the reception team had been with the previous NHS-focused owner for years. 'They weren't interested in the plan,' she says. 'But GDC regulations are clear: communication is key. Patients need to be told about their options.'

In cases like this, Selina has even spent time on reception herself, modelling how to talk to patients about the plan. 'It's about showing, not just telling.'

If team members remain resistant, it may be time for a performance review. Selina says: 'If you're not doing what your owner is asking, and you're not giving patients the option, then maybe it's time to say goodbye.'

### SET CLEAR TARGETS AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSES

Louise works with her practice owners to set realistic monthly targets to help them achieve their end goal. 'I advise using charts to track joiners, leavers, and net growth. Practice Plan practices can monitor all these details on Supportal. The dashboard shows all of this information in real time so you can monitor all of these things easily. For example, you could set goals like 15 new patients in March and reward the team when they hit them.'

This approach helps staff see the bigger picture and understand how their efforts contribute to the practice's success. 'Owners can quantify what those sign-ups mean financially,' Louise explains. 'So, it's worth investing in incentives.'

Incentives are about more than just rewards; they're about recognition, motivation, and creating a culture of growth. Whether it's cupcakes, vouchers, or an air fryer, the right incentive can transform a passive team into go-getters and passionate promoters of your membership plan.

So, ask your team members what they want. Set clear goals. Track progress. Celebrate wins and watch those numbers climb!

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# ‘A moment bigger than the trophy’

**Riaz Sharif** shares what winning Young Dentist – South West and Wales at the 2025 Private Dentistry Awards means to him

**I**n 2025, I was honoured to receive the accolade of Young Dentist of the Year – South West and Wales at the Private Dentistry Awards.

For someone who qualified from a small town dental school in Slovakia amid the uncertainty and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, this recognition felt both surreal and profoundly humbling.

The decision to submit an entry was not an easy one. For a long time, I questioned whether my journey truly belonged on such a platform. My career had been shaped by setbacks, detours and unconventional choices rather than linear progression.

What ultimately gave me the confidence to apply was not the pursuit of accolades, but the response I received after sharing my story openly on dental podcasts and professional platforms. Colleagues reached out to say that my honesty around failure, resilience and perseverance had reignited belief in their own journeys.

The application itself became a reflection of everything my journey had involved. It captured not only my clinical development and postgraduate training, but also the values that underpin my approach to dentistry: ethical care, lifelong learning, patient centred outcomes, mentorship and personal growth.

It was never about presenting a flawless career. It was about demonstrating commitment, integrity, resilience and, most of all, authenticity.

## FINDING THE RIGHT PATH

When my name was announced at the awards ceremony at the JW Marriott Grosvenor House in London, I was genuinely lost for words. In that moment, the recognition transcended personal achievement. It symbolised validation for every overseas graduate, every dentist who has faced rejection and every individual who has taken an unconventional route while continuing to believe in their potential.

One of my favourite quotes comes from one of my favourite motivational speakers, Les Brown, who said: ‘Don’t let someone’s opinion of you become your reality’.

I share my career journey in the hope that it may inspire readers from all backgrounds, particularly those navigating the early stages of their careers in private dentistry. My path into dentistry was never planned. I was raised as an orphan in east London, with no knowledge of my birth parents and grew up surrounded by significant childhood disruption. Stability, structure and academic direction were largely absent – and dentistry was never something I imagined would be part of my future.

For many years, my environment shaped my outlook far more than ambition ever could. My early life was driven by survival rather than aspiration.



**Dr Riaz Sharif**

Riaz is a multi-award-winning clinician practising across London and the south of England.







PRIVATE  
DENTISTRY AWARDS 2025

WINNER

At the 2025 Private Dentistry Awards, Riaz Sharif took home the trophy for Young Dentist South West and Wales.



## SPOTLIGHT

What I have come to understand, however, is that one person or one moment can quietly alter the trajectory of a life. Often, it is not opportunity or guidance that changes us, but belief. For me, that belief came from my foster father, David. I called him my best friend.

At a time when my life was being pulled towards the streets of east London and a crime-fuelled lifestyle, David saw something in me that no one else had noticed: hope, resilience and potential. He was undergoing dental treatment at Guy's Hospital and spoke with admiration about the dental students caring for him.

Although I had no interest in healthcare at the time, his belief planted a seed. More importantly, his faith in me planted purpose.

### AN UNCONVENTIONAL ACADEMIC JOURNEY

I later went on to complete a bachelor's degree in biomedical science at the University of Birmingham in 2012. That achievement alone felt significant. However, my journey into dentistry was far from straightforward. My dental education spanned more than 12 years and was shaped by setbacks, failures and disruption.

I did not gain entry into any UK postgraduate dental schools. Instead of viewing rejection as an endpoint, I chose to see it as redirection. I made the difficult decision to study dentistry abroad, beginning in Budapest before continuing my training in Slovakia. Studying across two countries presented immense challenges. I had to adapt to new cultures, unfamiliar systems, and learn new languages. In Hungary, I learned the language to near fluency, with all examinations conducted in front of a board of examiners.

Financial pressures were constant, and I funded my tuition fees and living costs while working as a personal trainer. Fear of failure loomed continuously.

I failed my final year in Budapest and had to continue my studies in Slovakia for an additional four years. At the time, it felt devastating. In hindsight, those setbacks became the foundations of my resilience. They taught me discipline, patience and perseverance.

I ultimately qualified as a dentist in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. For overseas graduates, securing mentorship and appropriate

placements in the UK presents further challenges. Yet once again, persistence proved essential.

### ALL IN ALIGNMENT

I began my professional career working full time within the NHS. While this environment offered invaluable experience, I always knew my long-term vision lay in private dentistry. I wanted to develop advanced clinical skills, build confidence and practise dentistry in a way that aligned with my values and passion for excellence.

Mentorship played a pivotal role in this transition. I have been fortunate to learn from exceptional clinicians, including Dr Monik Vasant, who profoundly influenced my understanding of private dentistry. The guidance I received reshaped my mindset, clinical approach and professional aspirations.

From a young age, I was fascinated by art, and dentistry became the perfect blend of science, creativity and human connection. I completed a postgraduate diploma in aesthetic and restorative dentistry and undertook extensive further training in minimally invasive techniques. Learning from outstanding clinicians has allowed me to refine my craft and consistently deliver high quality, patient centred care.

### LESSONS FROM AN UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY

If my journey offers reassurance to younger colleagues, particularly those aspiring towards private dentistry, it is that there is no single definition of success. Self-belief is essential. Regardless of background or upbringing, we all possess the ability to create change when we commit fully to growth.

Resilience is not innate; it is built through adversity. Caring for mental and physical wellbeing is equally vital. Boxing has been my constant outlet since childhood and continues to shape my discipline, focus, and emotional resilience. In a demanding profession, wellbeing is not optional; it is foundational.

Authenticity matters. Being genuine allows patients to connect and colleagues to trust. Gratitude and humility have grounded me throughout my journey.

Personal branding also plays an important role. Building a positive professional presence, particularly on



social media, can support early career development and ease the transition into private practice. Be memorable for the right reasons. As Ed Mylett says: 'The secret to success is simple. Be obsessed with getting better every single day.'

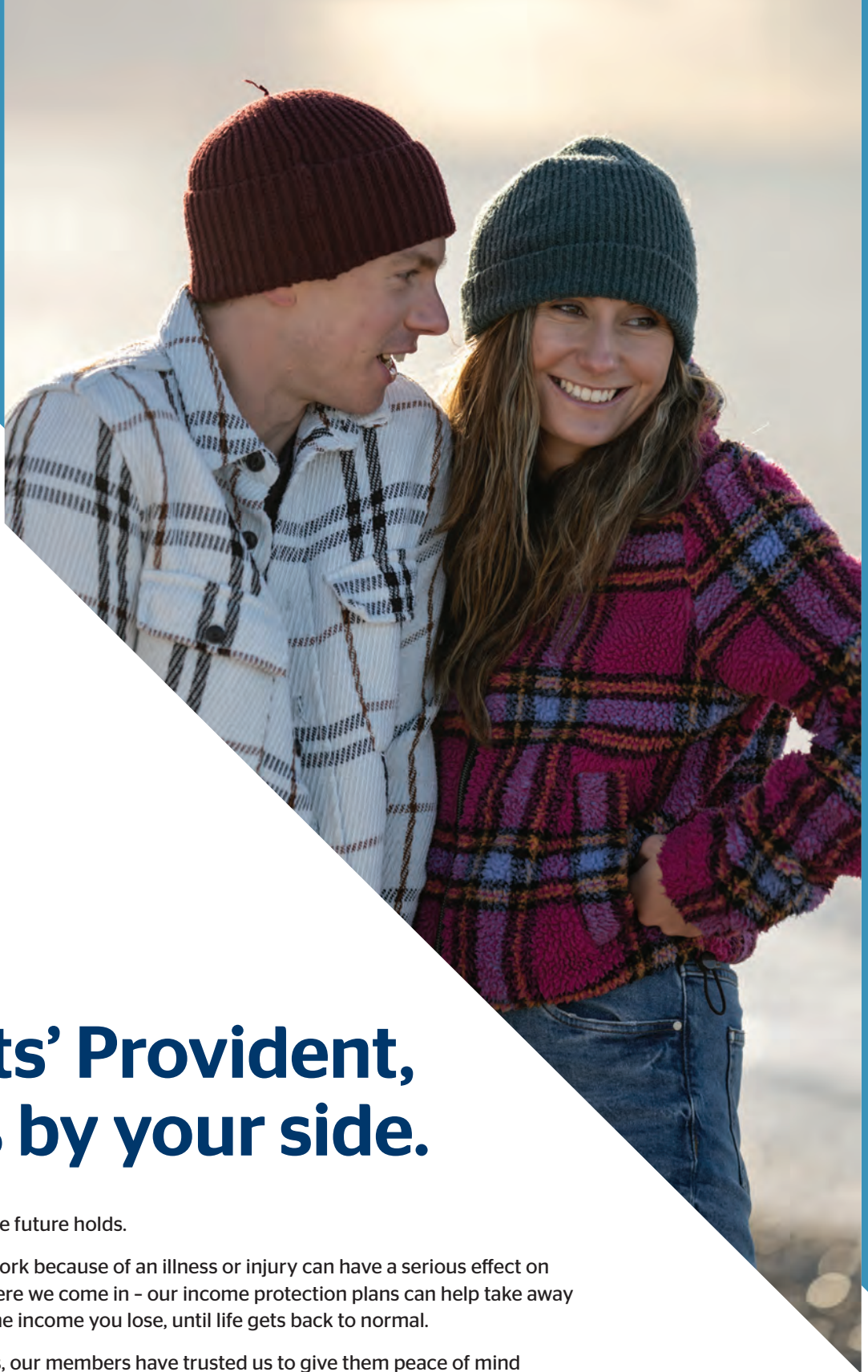
### A PURPOSE GREATER THAN THE PROFESSION

No accolade, title or trophy will ever redefine who I am. At my core remains the young boy who once searched for safety, belonging and hope. Dentistry has given me far more than a career. It has given me purpose, stability and a platform to positively influence others.

I remain deeply grateful for every mentor who believed in me, every patient who trusted me, and every challenge that forced me to grow. I also carry the quiet presence of my late foster father, David, whose belief shaped everything that followed. I know he is watching, and I know I am making him proud.

To anyone reading this who feels behind, uncertain or discouraged, remember this: your starting point does not determine your destination. Progress is built through persistence, discipline and belief.

If my journey proves anything, it is that success is not reserved for the fortunate or the faultless. It belongs to those willing to endure discomfort, rise after failure and remain faithful to their purpose. Sometimes, the greatest achievements are not the titles we earn, but the lives we change, including our own.



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# From 'probably fine' to provably compliant

What dental practices learned in 2025, and what inspectors are focusing on in 2026

**D**ental practices entered 2025 under more pressure than ever. Time was tighter. Expectations were higher. And compliance increasingly sat in the background until something brought it sharply into focus.

Across the year, our compliance advisers worked closely with practices of all sizes. Looking back, clear patterns emerged – not just about where practices struggled, but about the quiet gaps that caused the most stress when scrutiny increased.

## WHAT WE REPEATEDLY SAW ACROSS PRACTICES IN 2025

Most practices weren't struggling because they didn't care about compliance. They were struggling because the way compliance lived inside the practice hadn't kept pace with how it's now being assessed.

Across practices, we repeatedly saw:

- Evidence that existed, but wasn't easy to find, review or explain
- Actions logged, but not clearly followed up or communicated
- Compliance knowledge sitting with one person, creating pressure and risk
- Assumptions that things were 'probably fine', until something triggered closer scrutiny.

These weren't dramatic failures. They were gaps that built over time, and often where inspectors, advisors and practice teams spent the most time.

## WHAT CONFIDENT PRACTICES DID DIFFERENTLY

One of the clearest lessons from 2025 was that confidence didn't come from

doing more compliance. It came from doing it differently.

Practices that felt calmer and better prepared moved away from relying on memory and last-minute fixes. Instead, they leaned into clearer systems, shared responsibility and visibility.

When teams understood why something mattered, not just what they needed to do, engagement improved and responsibility was shared. Compliance became part of everyday working, rather than something saved for inspection preparation.

## WHAT INSPECTORS ARE FOCUSING ON NOW

As we move into 2026, expectations around governance, evidence and accountability continue to rise. In many cases, the rules haven't changed – but how compliance is being assessed has.

Inspectors are spending less time asking whether something exists, and more time exploring how it's used, reviewed and improved.

Across the sector, there is increased focus on:

- Clear audit trails and follow-through
- Real-time evidence, not retrospective explanations
- Consistency across multi-site practices
- Demonstrating learning, not just recording training.

Having policies and records in place is no longer enough. Inspectors want to see how they're used in practice.

## WHY SUPPORT STILL MATTERS

Looking ahead, the most confident practices aren't trying to fix everything at once. They're making small, steady shifts – moving compliance into shared systems, building simple routines, and asking questions early.

Compliance can feel isolating if teams think they're expected to know everything. The right combination of clear systems and experienced support helps practices feel calmer, more organised and better prepared.

If any of these pressure points feel familiar, book a demo to see how Dentistry Compliance can help your practice move from 'probably fine' to confidently compliant.

## Common compliance pressures seen in 2025

- CPD gaps across employed and self-employed team members
- Audits completed, but actions not clearly communicated
- Tasks done, but not evidenced or signed off
- Limited oversight of how compliance was being maintained day to day
- Difficulty evidencing team understanding of compliance responsibilities.

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## IN THE HOT SEAT

Aesthetic restorative dentist **Gary O'Neill** answers this month's quick-fire questions

**Q When and where was your last meal out?**

**A** At The Tilley Lamp, which is a local, family-run restaurant in Ardboe, Northern Ireland. We caught up with our parents for a relaxed pre-Christmas get-together. Good food, good company!

**Q Who would play you in the movie of your life?**

**A** Cillian Murphy perhaps. Someone intense enough to capture the energy of a man who photographs their dentistry more than their holidays!

**Q What's the best advice you've received?**

**A** 'Slow down to become faster.' Precision always wins.

**Q What's your guilty pleasure?**

**A** Having Michael Jackson on full blast while I'm deep into a three-hour prep. For me, nothing gets the focus going like a bit of MJ in the background.

**Q What was the last gift you received?**

**A** A patient recently gifted me a bottle of whisky. It was completely unexpected but very much appreciated.

**Q Describe your perfect holiday...**

**A** Honestly, as long as it's with my partner and completely away from teeth, it could be anywhere! Sunshine helps, but uninterrupted time together is what makes it perfect.

**Q What's your all-time favourite movie?**

**A** *The Devil Wears Prada*. Pure Miranda Priestly energy, iconic and endlessly quotable.

**Q What song is guaranteed to make you want to dance?**

**A** Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough by Michael Jackson. It's pure Champagne music that gets everyone moving.

**Q What keeps you up at night?**

**A** As most dentists would say... our lovely patients. There's always a case, a smile design, or a treatment plan quietly running in the background of my mind.

**Q How do you unwind?**

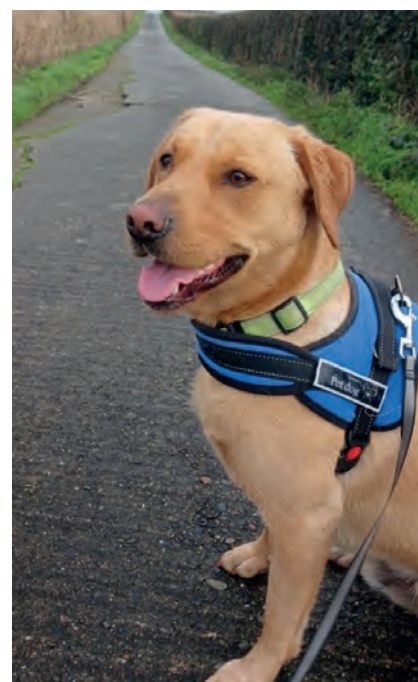
**A** Spending time with my partner and my dog, playing tennis, and cooking. Although, if I'm honest, it's mostly the eating that does the unwinding.

**Q If you won the lottery, what would you do with the money?**

**A** I'd cancel tomorrow's list and head straight to the airport – no questions asked. The dental education centre can come later.

**Q What was the last photo you took on your phone?**

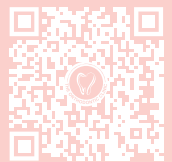
**A** It was of our labrador, Bó. If it's not teeth, it's pictures of my dog.







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