

## COMPETITOR CONVERSION CASE STUDY

# Winning Smiles, Gillingham, Dorset

### BACKGROUND

As a passionate believer in the value of publically funded healthcare, when Murray Hawkins opened his first practice in Gillingham 19 years ago, there was no doubt that he was NHS 'through and through'.

The practice, which was on the site of a former hairdresser's shop, was very popular and after 18 months Murray had so many patients signing up that he had to bring in a part-time assistant. However, he remembers that although he was becoming increasingly busy, paradoxically there seemed to be less money.

"We were working long hours just to stand still. It came to a point where I realised that despite the long, busy hours I was putting in, I'd actually earned £10,000 less than the previous year. I think this must have been my 'Road to Damascus' moment and I knew I had to reassess my faith in the NHS."

Faced with this dilemma, Murray decided to change tack. He approached Denplan and began to actively recruit private patients. The scheme started well with almost every patient replying to the letter that they were sent; half of these became fee per item patients and the other half signed up to the plan.

Yet despite the success of the conversion process, Murray began to feel that he had very little control of his own business brand.

"I'd chosen what I considered to be the most experienced company and the brand leader, but I became concerned that I was too busy helping to build Denplan's brand, when I really wanted to build my own. After all, your brand is your goodwill; your best asset. Why would you want to give away your best asset to a third party?"

Having no control over the Murray Hawkins brand was just one problem. Murray also discovered that although Denplan offered him lots of enjoyable conferences and lunches, what he really wanted, and needed, was an efficient and cost effective administration service, without having to pay for all the extras.

### SOLUTION

By coincidence, one of Murray's own patients happened to be Quentin Skinner, Chairman of payment plan provider DPAS. Murray remembers the first discussion they had about the future of his practice.

"I knew it was time for a change. Quentin was totally confident about his product and immensely knowledgeable about dentistry finance in general. I liked the DPAS approach. It wasn't prescriptive, but it seemed fully equipped and able to provide me with the advice and information I needed."

The meeting was to have a profound effect: it boosted Murray's confidence and gave him the freedom and reassurance to begin planning his ideal practice.

His first step was to undertake some research into the available options and Murray was certainly thorough. He visited 20 different practices around the country, from local practices to those in Harley Street, London, giving inspiration to his vision for his own practice.

## **COMPETITOR CONVERSION CASE STUDY CONTINUED**

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The research resulted in Murray deciding to fully computerise the surgery and install a central sterilisation system.

“It’s a great system. There’s a tray for every job. If you’re planning a root filling, then everything you need will be on the tray. The trays come from and return to the central sterilising room through clean and dirty hatches. It’s dental Nirvana!”

In May 2006, with his master plan fully formed, Murray began to put it all into action. In one clean sweep over a weekend, the Murray Hawkins Dental Practice closed down at its old premises, and re-emerged as Winning Smiles in a new, purpose-built surgery, complete with its innovative computer and sterilisation systems.

#### **BENEFITS**

Today the Winning Smiles practice is thriving. Murray has now taken on an associate, Bethan Fletcher, a clinical dental technician, James Nielson, three part-time hygienists and six nurses who also act as fully trained receptionists.

In the state-of-the-art surgeries, the much sought after computer and sterilisation systems are working well. The waiting room is furnished with comfortable leather chairs, and patients are able to savour the aroma and flavour of proper coffee.

To calm potentially anxious patients, the practice has also installed a virtual fish tank, with images of whales, fish and turtles providing a gentle distraction.

Today Murray has over 4,300 private patients – with around 700 signed up to a DPAS administered plan.

As part of Murray’s new practice-branded scheme, the plan patients are now divided into 11 bands whereas the old system was limited to only five groups. This has given the practice more flexibility and confidence to move the patients into more appropriate bands and Murray says that the new system has been well received by both staff and patients alike.

Best of all, Murray finally has the feeling that he has control of his own brand. Not only that, but he says that changing his plan administration to DPAS has already saved him £10,000 a year – meaning he can charge his patients less. As Murray says: “Everyone’s a winner at Winning Smiles!”

To find out more about the Winning Smiles Conversion and how DPAS can make your existing payment plan administration work more efficiently, please visit [www.dpas.co.uk](http://www.dpas.co.uk) or call us on 01747 870910.