

# 5 WAYS TO... LAUNCH A DENTAL PLAN

**Martin Grimes, practice manager at 740 Dental in Bournemouth offers guidance on implementing a dental plan**

Changing the funding model of your practice is a big step, but whether your move is from the NHS to private, whether you have concluded that fee-per-item remains too risky an approach in these financially constrained times, or - as in our case - you have perceived more suitable benefits from an alternative provider, once the decision has been made, believe me, you will feel better.

In our case it was the decision to change dental plan provider that was our challenge. But in my experience, actually taking the decision was the most difficult part and once made, the whole practice felt an enormous sense of relief and well-being. We knew that we had embarked on a journey and the whole team had a focus for their energy and enthusiasm, all we needed now was a little bit of help from an expert company in dental plan administration, so we turned to DPAS - our chosen partner for the great adventure ahead.

Despite the fact that we were changing provider, as opposed to introducing a plan for the first time, the change still required careful planning and execution. Here are the five areas I feel were most important for us to get right.

## 1. HAVE SOUND CONSULTANCY

Top of my list and something that I really feel we could not have done without was the external consultancy provided by our new partner DPAS. Having the benefit of objective advice is always important, but even more so when you know the advice is based on years of experience and market knowledge and that



In-house training and staff support is important when introducing a new payment plan

their recommendations are in the best interests of the practice.

DPAS' practice consultant worked with us from the start, in particular helping me to project manage every aspect of the plan's launch and I had complete confidence in her ability. She organised training to familiarise herself with both the practice and the staff and was then in the practice from day one of the launch giving our reception staff self-assurance and enthusiasm. She answered the phone, listened to patients' queries, responded in a calm and efficient manner and led the team from the front. And because she was based in reception she was able to get a first-hand feel for what the general patient reaction was and then helped our staff to positively answer questions and explain the benefits of our new dental plan. Her presence made a real difference and I

would encourage anyone embarking on a plan change of whatever nature to try and access similar services.

## 2. PLAN THE LAUNCH

Changing anything to do with the way you get paid requires thorough consideration, as you only have one chance to get it right. My advice is to plan everything in meticulous detail, don't rush into anything and try to make sure you have covered every angle. We discussed every aspect of our new plan with our practice consultant and having been through this process with numerous practices before, her input was invaluable. She was able to highlight possible problematic areas, making sure we were aware of the need to communicate with patients clearly and effectively and that we understood the need to afford them every



When introducing a new payment plan, all staff members need to be included and on board

opportunity to return their forms and sign up to our new plan.

Even the timing of closing down our previous dental plan was scheduled to give patients enough time to consider their options, but at the same time to make sure the process wasn't too drawn out. This was a delicate balancing act and to be able to draw on the experience of others helped us to plan our approach and execute it precisely.

### 3. GET THE PRICING RIGHT

Getting the price of your plan right from the outset is one of the most important factors in a successful launch and is worth dedicating a serious amount of time to. Patients need to understand that joining a dental plan is of benefit to them, not only in spreading the cost of treatment but also by rewarding their financial commitment to the practice. In our case we again sought advice from our practice consultant and had much discussion about which elements of treatment should be included. We had already identified that the inclusion of endodontic treatment in our existing plan was causing us an issue and a certain amount of inequality amongst the patients. The inclusion of endodontic treatment would mean that every patient would have to pay more for their plan regardless of whether they ever needed this treatment. We wanted to retain the existing costs of our plan so we made the decision to remove endodontic treatment.

Although there was some initial discontent about this, when the reasons were explained to patients they understood, and our decision to exclude it from our new plan was happily accepted.

### 4. ALWAYS HAVE SUPPORT ON HAND

Training and motivation of our internal team played a vital role in the success of our launch and DPAS was instrumental in creating and executing a training plan. In-practice training sessions were held during which our practice consultant answered questions from the team, explaining the launch plan, the timeline and agreeing overall aims. She worked with the team to make sure they were entirely comfortable with the process and that we had complete 'buy-in' from every member of staff. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of staff support when introducing a dental plan - they are the people who talk face-to-face with patients and they need to believe in the value and integrity of the product.

When choosing a plan administrator, in my view you need a 'partner' rather than just a supplier and one that is in it for the long haul. From my experience it would be very difficult to maintain a plan if a good level of support did not exist long term. It is easy for a company to be enthusiastic when you are a new customer and to be on hand during the excitement of the initial launch phase, but now being 16 months down the road with our plan I regard the

on-going commitment from DPAS to be even more important.

Visits from our practice consultant are regular and thorough and this continual care means we are motivated to continually monitor numbers of patients on-plan, which in turn makes us able to respond to issues quickly and efficiently and also means the whole team is continually focused on gaining new plan members.

### 5. GET THE LITERATURE RIGHT

Printing is an expensive process and dealing with financial matters means that every part of your communication needs to be correct. To do this ourselves would have been very time consuming but fortunately DPAS' in-house design and printing service was on hand to deal with all our needs. They used our logo and branding to create a suite of patient literature that introduced our new plan, featuring patient benefits and meeting the legal requirements of a financial product, as well as writing and distributing letters explaining the reasons behind our new practice branded plan. This was a great relief for me, just being able to make tweaks here and there, rather than having to source a designer and printer and then write copy for the brochure was the perfect solution to what could have been a real headache.

### SUMMARY

When introducing a dental plan my advice is to select a partner who adds something to what you already have. Many companies can help you implement your ideas but with DPAS we have always felt that their inclusion has brought an extra dimension from which we have really benefited. DPAS engaged with what we were trying to achieve from our dental plan from the outset and I have no doubt that their input was a major factor in our success.

For more information on DPAS practice branded dental plans contact 01747 870910 or visit [www.dpas.co.uk](http://www.dpas.co.uk).

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