



your dental plans

Your practice. Your patients. Your choice.

CASE STUDY

Geoffrey S Worrall & Associates, Wincanton

BACKGROUND

After 31 years running his successful practice in Wincanton, Somerset, the decision to go private was not one that Geoffrey Worrall took lightly.

For many years he had offered what he considered to be the equivalent of private practice standards to his NHS patients, but he knew he had to make changes if he was to meet the challenges that the new contract would bring for all dentists.

Geoff had qualified in 1971 and worked with a community dentist in Birmingham before spending four years working in South Africa. When he moved back to the UK, he was eventually able to fulfil his dream and open his own practice.

Practice manager and Geoff's wife Terina Worrall vividly recalls the pressures that were on Geoff and his staff.

"As an NHS practice it was extremely busy and stressful. For 15 years we had been a training practice for newly qualified dentists. We had three dentists in the practice and 6,000 patients – prior to the change we were extremely busy and it was challenging," she said.

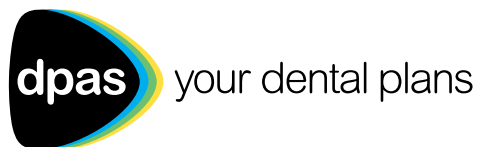
Geoff took pride in being involved with the local community. A keen sportsman, he was well known for his love of rugby and to many of his patients Geoff was more of a friend than just the man they went to see when you had toothache.

However, having such strong local links brought responsibilities and Geoff knew that if he was to make the move to go private, it had to be handled professionally and with sensitivity. After mulling over the possibility for several years, it was the future running of the practice that compelled Geoff to take steps – under the NHS, attracting the right newly qualified dentists to become associates was proving too challenging.

"It was difficult enough to get the right associates because of the shortage of dentists but they were just not keen to take on NHS work," said Terina, whose prophecies in a 2003/04 report on the future of dentistry for her diploma in management were coming eerily true.

SOLUTION

Having looked at the options available for them and their patients, Geoff and Terina chose to set up a payment plan with DPAS in January 2002. They liked the fact they could decide the fee scale and also felt reassured that the company was based nearby.



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CASE STUDY CONTINUED

GEOFFREY S WORRALL & ASSOCIATES, WINCANTON

In preparation for the conversion, the practice invested significant time in involving its staff from the beginning. Valuing their opinions and aware that the change would impact on the entire team, Geoff and Terina consulted them closely. All staff members were very positive, agreeing that the move to private practice was the best solution.

Together, Geoff, Terina and the team took part in a series of brainstorming sessions to look at the questions that might arise: why were they becoming a private practice? How much was it going to cost patients? They were then able to produce a set of answers so that all staff could give every customer the same information.

Before making the final move, Geoff decided to give all his patients one final check-up and treatment under the NHS system and then move them over to private care. Although this involved a huge amount of work, he felt strongly that this was the most appropriate way of making the change from the patient's perspective.

With extensive experience in handling conversions, DPAS helped smooth the move by handling patient communications. Ahead of the conversion, every patient received a letter clearly explaining what was going to happen and inviting them for what would be their last NHS appointment with the practice. Geoff and his team then used this appointment to speak to them about future payment options.

Out of the 5,000 patients who stayed with the practice, 670 opted for the DPAS payment plan. Today, the practice has some fee per item patients, and still treats a number of NHS patients – namely under 18s and those in receipt of eligible benefits.

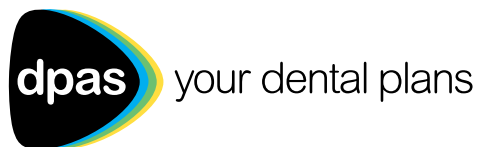
“Our feedback from patients was mostly positive; they couldn't believe it had taken us so long to make the move. Although there were inevitably a few who didn't like the new way and went off to other dentists, a lot have since come back because of the quality of service they receive here,” commented Terina.

BENEFITS

Patients at Geoff's practice have benefited on many levels, including:

- Longer appointments
- Insurance cover when they are away from home
- 10 percent discount on future treatment
- Emergency cover
- Direct Debit payment.

And for Geoff and his staff, the benefits have transformed the practice and their working day. They are able to provide a better quality of care in a better environment. The stress has gone and they have become far more focused on operating as a business.



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The practice has invested in digital x-ray equipment, air conditioning, revamped and repainted the building – and made its reception area more welcoming by replacing the hard wooden chairs in the waiting room with more comfortable seating.

“Little things like getting rid of the chairs and replacing them with sofas and making sure we have up-to-date magazines has helped to make the whole experience of visiting the dentist a happy one,” Terina explained. “Our dental nurses have an important role to play and we wanted our patients to appreciate their skills.”

The conversion has also given the practice more time to work together better as a team. In particular, to recognise the excellent service that the dental nurses provide – their photographs and qualifications are now on display for all to see.

Further improvements mean new patients are now being offered a ‘Smile Check’ where they are asked what they like about their teeth and what they would like to improve.

“The whole conversion process was a lot easier than we imagined thanks to DPAS’ help with the transition. We felt their support in a number of different ways – with administration and communications, as well as the advice they gave throughout. It’s been a really positive experience for us, the practice and our patients. It was the right choice.

“DPAS fully understands what is needed to run a successful practice and how to achieve that for the future of your business,” concluded Terina.

To find out more about how DPAS can help smooth your journey from NHS to private practice, or to see how we can make your existing payment plan administration work more efficiently, please call us on 01747 870910 or visit us at www.dpas.co.uk.