

# Taking the plunge

**How do you love the idea of private practice? Andrew Warren, of DPAS, counts the ways...**

How many practices are currently considering an imminent move to the private sector may currently be a point of conjecture, but it is true to say that the question probably lies at the back of most practitioners' minds.

Obviously, the financial implications of any move are a major consideration – both in terms of costs and in future revenue predictions. And, though in the past the grass may seem greener for those on the private side of the fence, certainly the last 12 months have tempered some of the green-eyed monsters.

When I discuss the conversion process with dentists, it is usually against a background of dissatisfaction with their NHS circumstances, or the hope that moving to the private sector will enhance their life, their income – or usually both.

Top of the list, when it comes to making the decision to convert, are the financial considerations and, when the banks inevitably ask for your business plan, they will want to see realistic predictions of patient numbers and revenues.

The decision to introduce a payment plan for the first time as part of your plan to convert is an important strategic decision for a practice and having the right kind of assistance is vital to ensuring the process runs smoothly without disrupting the day-to-day running of the practice.

Payment plans can play a huge role in helping to develop a successful private practice and the advantages of plans are many fold and benefit the practice and patient alike. For the principal, being able to predict consistent income levels is of huge financial relevance as is the ability to maintain income during holidays or periods of natural slow down. A payment plan offers patients a means of safeguarding their general oral health, giving them peace of mind and confidence and paying manageable monthly amounts is clearly more cost effective in the long run, as it ensures a good level of preventive care which will reduce the need for extensive, often costly treatment that can result from neglect. Communicating this message in a clear, concise and very positive manner can prove highly beneficial for both you and your patients.

There are many questions that may challenge a prospective dentist who is considering converting:

- How many patients do they need to attract privately to achieve their practice income?
- What should their plan charges should be?
- How should they communicate the change to their patients?
- How do they attract new patients?
- How do they make their patients feel valued post-conversion. [This may include methods of marketing the services, treatments and advance technologies that are available at the practice].

## **Desire**

In addition, the desire to retain control of the financial and intellectual value of your business is a key motivating factor for many practitioners who make the move from NHS to the private sector. Most private practices spend financial and human resources on developing a brand and some have found that the credibility of this has been undermined by their enrolment with a nationally branded payment plan – causing the differentiation of their practice from any other to diminish.

At DPAS, we have many years' experience of dealing with these situations and have helped to allay many of the fears of those in charge. We can advise and assist in communication with existing patients from the outset and have the experience to guide a practice through the process. Using our in-house artwork and printing facility we have the capacity to develop 'your' payment plan by designing you a new logo, writing letters and dealing with distribution – in fact, we can manage the whole process on your behalf.

Affordability is on the lips of all consumers at the moment and dental patients are no different. We know that many practices, of all persuasions, are currently experiencing a downturn in attendance for routine maintenance and a reduction in the take-up of treatment plans – complex or otherwise. Providing a solution for patients in this area can be of real value for both parties – and without doubt, dental plans have a role to play in providing a sensible means of budgeting for patients.

There is the peace of mind in knowing that:

- (i) Patients who have already paid for routine care are

more likely to attend

(ii) That a certain level of monthly income is assured. These facts remove some of the key barriers to conversion in one fell swoop. In these times of economic uncertainty, you need to be aware of the need to keep control of costs.

So, choose a plan that exactly matches your needs and those of your patients; this makes the process of convincing patients of the benefits of change much easier. For practices who convert a high percentage of patients to a DPAS plan the benefits are further enhanced due to a flat monthly charge, made irrespective of the number of dentists, patients or plans, and a fee that hasn't changed since 1996.

Parting with hard-earned cash can be difficult for both you and your patients, so it's essential that you partner with a plan provider that places high emphasis on added-value. Practices can rest assured that we do not compromise on the quality of our service and in addition to a low cost plan administration, we offer a variety of business and marketing services to help practices maximise plan take-up. Be it through the support of a team of experienced consultants, excellent in-house facilities, nationwide seminars or resources on practice marketing, be sure you get exactly what you pay for when implementing a payment plan! The introduction of a practiced-branded payment plan makes sense when converting to private practice, both financially and in terms of the benefits such a move can bring to patients.

The ability of a practice to control all elements of its service provision means it can attract and retain patients, building levels of patient satisfaction that will provide a strong foundation on which to build future growth.



If you're considering the move to private practice, or have just made the change and would like further advice, please call DPAS on 01747 870910 or visit [www.dpas.co.uk](http://www.dpas.co.uk).