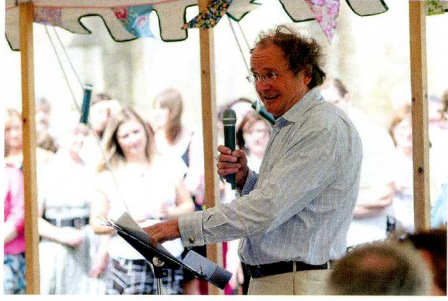


From 'boring backroom' to 'party' plan

AT the fifteenth minute of the fifteenth hour of the fifteenth day of August, Dental Practice Administration Systems (DPAS) marked its fifteenth birthday, writes *Caroline Holland*.

A marquee garlanded with fluttering bunting, a serenading band, a lunch with champagne and cake. Could this event really be hosted by DPAS, the dental practice scheme deliberately set up to be boring? Well, yes. DPAS chairman, Quentin Skinner, wanted to celebrate the success of an organisation which has built up over 65 staff members, 650 customer practices and 350,000 patients on plans. The venue was the magnificent courtyard setting of Place Farm where DPAS has its offices. In his speech, he outlined the history of DPAS, telling his audience he set the organisation up as a backroom administrator. "As I enjoyed telling people, the very name of the company was boring – Dental Payment Administration Services Limited, chosen to be very descriptive of what we do, but clearly with no consumer branding dimension whatsoever."



He went on to say that the whole world of UK private dental plans was started up 10 years earlier with the launch of Denplan by Stephen Noar and Marilyn Orcharton. Stephen, a non-executive director of DPAS, was not at the party but sent a message of congratulations. Marilyn Orcharton was there as was the former DPAS general manager, Derinne Pargiter, who, along with Steve Noar, Marilyn and Andrew Warren, now the director of DPAS, formed the original pioneering Denplan team. Another guest was Piers Butler, the solicitor who formulated the very structure of UK dental capitation plans. Quentin thanked them all for their support.

Among the high points of the last 15 years, said Quentin, was the "tsunami" of new business at the start of 2006 and the subsequent investment in the company's infrastructure. He wanted to position DPAS so it was the natural choice for dentists looking to use dental plans and it could cope well with even bigger tsunamis. He went on to discuss current funding of dentistry including the UDA system, which he said was "unsustainable and unfair". Perhaps, he mused, the move to centralised commissioning in 2013 may see some regularisation of UDA values: "Whether it's sooner or later, a swing back towards private dentistry is inevitable."

He continued: "A radical government would grasp the nettle and move NHS dental funding to the provision of a good core service for the needy, rather than continuing the pretence that NHS dentistry is a universal benefit, enjoyed by all and free at the point of delivery... It is none of these things."

Quentin said he did in fact invite the Chief Dental Officer for England to join the party, but he declined: "Perhaps not surprising, since the last time we talked, he told me that he disagreed with absolutely everything I have ever said!" By this stage, all the staff of DPAS had left their desks in the neighbouring offices and joined the party for a few minutes and, as the minute hand of the clock turned to the fifteenth minute of the fifteenth hour of the fifteenth day of the month, Quentin toasted DPAS.