

Ring in the changes

Is the New Year a time to herald changes in your practice, asks **Andrew Warren**?

As we enter yet another New Year, many of us will have been troubled by thoughts of the dreaded 'New Year resolution' a life changing resolve that hopefully means we won't all be on the same treadmill for the next 12 months. Of course, this year is slightly different to 12 months ago when we were in the full face of 'recession blues' but at least there was an element of certainty in that situation. This year we face the prospect of an 'Are we, aren't we?' situation. Depending on which side of the political divide you sit – or rather which newspaper you read, the economic predictions for the coming year are very different.

The decision of whether to convert to private practice during the coming year is even more complex than usual.

So does this matter to a National Health Service dentist whose practice remains reasonably busy with a contract intact? So long as targets are met, surely the future looks, if not dazzling then certainly reasonably bright? For some, of course, the NHS works supremely well, it provides stable income and has an element of security and predictability. However, 2010 will be an election year and whatever the eventual colour of the Downing Street carpets, the incumbent will have to deal with



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● Is it time for you to make that first important phone call of 2010?

the ever increasing national debt. This in turn will certainly affect NHS funding and where dentistry will come in that pecking order is anyone's guess.

My point in all of this is that the decision of whether to convert to private practice during the coming year is even more complex than usual.

When I discuss the conversion process with dentists it is usually against a background of dissatisfaction with their NHS circumstances or in the hope that the 'private pond' will provide them an opportunity to enhance their life, their

income or usually both.

So is private practice the nirvana that some dentists assume it to be? It certainly can be if approached in the right manner. By using the help that is available you can plot a course through the conversion and emerge on the other side, relishing the challenge ahead.

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 be?

- How should they communicate the change to their patients?
- How do they attract new patients?
- How to make their patients feel valued post-conversion, which may include methods of marketing the services, treatments and advance technologies that are available at the practice?

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 can design you a new logo, write letters, deal 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. For practices there is the peace of mind in knowing that:

- patients who have already paid for routine care are more likely to attend,
- 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, we are only too aware of the need to keep control of costs. Our flexibility means we are able to design 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 which convert a high percentage of patients to a plan the benefits are further enhanced due to our flat monthly charge made irrespective of the number of dentists, patients or plans, a fee that hasn't changed since 1996.

So, if you are one of the many thousands making a New Year resolution to lose weight, join a gym or play more golf, think also about your professional life and how one phone call could make a significant change to your 2010.

If you're considering the move to private practice or have just made the change, make one of your New Year resolutions to give DPAS a call and find out how we can help you make the most of private practice. ■

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