

New beginning

Andrew Warren reminds principals it is their practice.

What is your New Year's resolution? Lose weight, drink less? But how many of you are making converting to private practice during 2011 a serious New Year's resolution?

What might encourage one to grasp the nettle and leap into the private sector? Well, greater independence, financially (and arguably clinically) greater rewards are just two reasons a dentist might decide to convert. But with these benefits also comes an element of risk and with plenty of reports that patients still remain reluctant to accept complex treatment plans, the question raised is whether the risk is worth it?

What might encourage one to grasp the nettle and leap into the private sector?

Minimising the financial implications of conversion should be top of the list when it comes to making the decision to convert. Gone are the days when an application for a bank loan from a dentist was simply a case of a rubber stamp. Every bank now demands a structured business plan that includes realistic predictions of patient numbers and revenues.

In providing such stable predictions, there is no doubt as to the valuable role payment plans play. For the principal, the ability to forecast consistent income levels even during holidays or periods of natural slow-down is of huge financial relevance. For the

patient, payment plans offer a means of safeguarding their general oral health, giving them peace of mind and confidence.

Paying manageable monthly amounts is clearly more cost effective in the long run ensuring a good level of preventive care which will reduce the need for extensive, often costly treatment that can result from neglect. Affordability is still on the lips of many consumers as practices continue to experience reduced attendance for routine maintenance and a slow-down in the uptake of treatment plans. Providing a dental plan solution for patients in this area is of real value for both parties. It provides a sensible means of budgeting for patients and for practices the peace of mind in knowing that patients who have already paid for routine care are more likely to attend and that a certain level of monthly income is assured. This removes some of the risk factors of conversion in one fell swoop.

In addition, the desire to retain control of the financial and 'intellectual' value of your business is a key motivating factor for many dentists who make the move from NHS to the private sector. Most private practices spend resources on developing a brand. Using a practice branded solution offers the ability to maintain the prominence of your own brand identity and builds on the loyalty of your patients.

Costs are a key factor in running any business and ensuring you get best value for money from all your



● Going private may be the dawn of a successful new era for your practice.

suppliers is always a worthwhile endeavour. Whilst cost effective does not necessarily equate with 'cheapest', ensuring you are not wasting money on elements of a service you will never use is important.

My recommendation to practices is always to consider individually whether the additional services on offer from some plan providers are of real benefit to them. Or, whether they would prefer a lower cost option, which still includes all the additional support they need to launch and administer their plan, but leaves them with the money they save in administration costs to spend on other goods and services from which their practice would benefit.

The introduction of a cost-effective practiced-branded payment plan makes perfect sense when converting to private practice. The ability to control all elements of your service provision means you can attract and retain patients and develop levels of patient satisfaction that will provide a strong foundation on which to build substantial future growth. ■



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