

# Your practice, your plan

Andrew Warren on the importance of a payment scheme.

During the course of a year, I visit hundreds of practices of all different types; National Health Service, mixed, private, some with DPAS payment plans in place, some provided by our competitors, and I discuss with them all the benefits that can be enjoyed simply by introducing a payment plan into a practice.

One of the key environmental factors for successful business is predictability, and certainly over the last 12 months many practitioners have come to

realise that uncertainty in the lives of their patients has a knock-on effect, which has manifested itself in our industry in a downturn in attendance for routine appointments and a reduction in the uptake of treatment plans.

Even the weather in the early part of January conspired against the profession, resulting in an upsurge of attendance failures. Without a motivation to regularly attend who knows how many of these patients may be lost forever?

Our client practices however have enjoyed a certain level of immunity from this market volatility, as patients on maintenance plans have every motivation to attend for hygiene appointments they are already paying

for and stable attendance figures from our client practices have borne this out.

A payment plan also ensures a level of cash-flow predictability that allows for income levels to be forecast with at least an element of certainty. The effect of this is to enhance your ability to plan, set achievable income targets and assess progress on a regular

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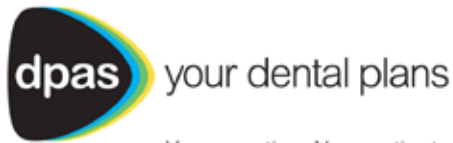
basis. Furthermore a payment plan ensures a defined level of income every month, even

before the practice opens its door. This has a positive impact by 'levelling out' the peaks and troughs associated with a fully fee-per-item practice, meaning you can retain income levels even when you are not in surgery.

But payment plans don't only work for the good of the practice, patients



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Your practice. Your patients. Your choice.

benefit from being able to budget for their dentistry, much as they do for other 'utilities'. Despite the fact that during the economic downturn, anecdotal evidence of consumers carefully checking their bank statements and cancelling any non-vital direct debits was rife, most of our client practices have not reported such actions. A payment plan allows patients to spread the cost of routine maintenance, reduces the impact of larger bills and, importantly, encourages patients to attend.

### Practice branded

The desire to retain control over the business is a key motivating factor for many practitioners who make the move, either wholly or in some part, from NHS to the private sector. Keeping control of the financial and 'intellectual' value of your business is therefore important. Most private practices spend financial and human resources on developing a 'brand' and some practices have found 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.

We have always understood patients who visit a particular practice do so for a variety of reasons, not least because they like and trust their dentist. The power of such loyalty, that may well have been built up over many years, is not something that should be dismissed and we have found patient take-up of plans is often enhanced because the plan is 'practice owned' and presented to patients by the dentist or practice manager who they know and trust.

The DPAS 'family' has been providing low cost practice branded payment plan solutions to the profession for over 14 years. Having been among the originators of the 'nationally branded' model of capitation, Quentin Skinner and I have spent more than 20 years coming to understand the pitfalls and advantages of every type of payment plan. DPAS client practices are able to design plans to meet their specific needs, and those of their patients without having to compromise to 'fit in' with a designated format. This gives our clients complete flexibility to build a range of plans that will help them attract and retain patients. The introduction of a payment plan makes sense for all types of 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 substantial future growth. ■

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