

# Understanding the virtues of continuous learning

*The Dentistry Business offers a range of courses available to dental nurses. Sim Goldblum, Partner in The Dentistry Business, discusses the various choices and benefits of continuing professional development, and important factors to consider when choosing to embark on a particular course.*

**T**he Dentistry Business is passionate about education, particularly in helping dental nurses and aspiring practice managers to acquire and develop their skills and knowledge. The Dentistry Business often extols the virtues of continuous learning and the importance of working in a practice where such learning and development is not just encouraged actively, but is a considered part of a practice leader's personnel development process.

Unfortunately, some dental practices are yet to recognize the benefit of staff retention and improved teamwork in implementing such a critical process.

This article discusses some of the choices available and the benefits that dental nurses can gain by embarking on a course of study that will help achieve personal development goals.

### Work-related education

Work-related education is now readily available and actively encouraged by the government through its support of Business Link and Train to Gain initiatives. Within the dental practice management sector, there are courses available which are accredited by Business And Technology Education

Council (BTEC), The Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), and university. While CPD courses have their place, obtaining an accredited qualification provides a long-term benefit, which should also be transferable to support further studies.

### What course is right for you?

The choice of course depends on an individual's current or anticipated job roles; existing qualifications from school, college or university; commitment to study; learning style, and one's long-term ambition.

If you have already obtained GCSEs and perhaps an NVQ level 3 as part of a nursing qualification, then you should be able to cope with a level 4 course accredited by BTEC or the ILM. If you have some relevant practice management experience, a level 4 university accredited programme may also be appropriate. If a level 4 and/or level 5 qualification has already been obtained through BTEC or the ILM, a university accredited course may be more suitable which will provide transferable credits at university level.

All of these courses require approximately 12 months' study, usually involving attending a workshop one day a month and following this up with reading and exercises, which will allow you to implement what you have learnt in your practice. It can be very advantageous if you and your principal are both learning at the same time.

### Learning style

Before deciding on the right course, it is important to consider your learning style—in other words, how you best acquire knowledge and skill. There are several assessment processes that are available on the web; they are easy to do and the results are available instantly. For example, you may prefer reading and working on the computer as a learning method and this may lead you to select a distance learning course.

Others may prefer to learn by listening to experienced teachers and discussing what has been learned in a workshop environment. Distance learning has the advantage of not requiring time away from the practice, but it also requires the discipline to work on your own.

Having already acquired a high level of clinical skills, many nurses also want to develop management skills that will help develop a wide and varied career path. To achieve this goal, it is important to select an education pathway that not only provides the information and skills that are currently needed, but will also allow you to extend your studies further in whichever way you wish. The most effective and flexible courses provide fully transferable credits.

### Choosing a relevant course

Finally, it is important to ensure that the course chosen is relevant. There are many management courses available, but few are written and

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provided by dental professionals who understand how the management theory can be applied successfully to

running a dental practice. What has been learned should be easily applied to practice.

Some students from The Dentistry Business have recently completed module 1 of their three-module Practice Management Certificate. They come from a variety of nursing and non-nursing backgrounds and they are now working on their first assessment. Assessments are not essays on theoretical topics, but are a portfolio of activities which are directly relevant to the practice. The questions are posed not just to ensure that students have understood, but that they are really able to reflect on their current practice operation and make improvement proposals that can be implemented.

### Financial support

Previous governments hailed the importance of 'education, education, education' and the new government has pledged its support also. Your local Business Link activity may be able to provide support to reduce the financial burden. DN

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