

Simple steps

Sim Goldblum explains the importance of professionalism.

I'm writing this on my return from the BDTA's Showcase at Excel, and continue, as a non-dentist, to be amazed at the extent of the choice available to dentists for equipment, consumables and sheer gizmos, not to mention the freebies that so many are so keen to snap up (how many pens and pencils can a practice really use?).

The exhibitors also reflected the increasing amount of Government regulation that practices have to endure, support, implement and cope with, not least of which are health and safety and the CQC. There appears to be lots of advice available, many organisations who claim to be specialists in the area and those who simply oppose,

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naturally for very good reasons.

While it would be inappropriate for me to get involved in the politics, Shakespeare's 'the lady (or gent) doth protest too much, methinks' does come to mind as the Government's steamroller rolls inexorably down the road. In the current economic climate, and I write in advance of the comprehensive spending review, all practices need to ensure they are presenting the most attractive, effective and



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patient-focused face to all patients, actual and potential, private, independent or NHS.

In our personal lives, we use search engines to find the best buys; we use comparison sites to search for all forms of commodity that we use on a regular basis, and our practice website is designed to be attractive when prospective patients find it, and optimised for search engines, so the inevitable 'dentist in X-town' or 'implants in my city' quickly lead to the optimum results.

So how can we best use the impending CQC registration to position ourselves as, not just a registered location, but as a recognised source of best practice that potential patients will be delighted to visit?

The keys to successful registration appear to be honesty, a

realistic assessment of our current situation, a clear and unambiguous action plan to achieve a compliant state and a set of processes, protocols and systems which are in use by a team of people who have been trained appropriately and are motivated to use them. What could be simpler? What's all the fuss about?

The reality I suppose, is that we are all conditioned to be afraid of and reluctant to change; we assume that change is expensive and often, correctly, that the 'rule of unintended consequences' will apply and that Governments will eventually change their mind and return us to the status quo.

The reality, however, is that although the British Dental Association and others may achieve some improvements in the timing or the amount of data that



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Care required to support registration, we will not be able to avoid it in the long run. I'm told that practices that have achieved the BDA's Good Practice Scheme will be granted an automatic bye and will be registered by default. Similar opportunities may arise for practices that have achieved Investors in People status. What do both these organisations require? You guessed it, 'a realistic assessment of our current situation, a clear and unambiguous action plan to achieve compliance date, and a set of processes, protocols and systems which are in use by a team of people who have been trained appropriately in a motivated way to use them.'

So what is stopping us being able to declare, for example, that everyone who uses our service receives great care and that we look after their welfare (outcome 4); that we have clear referral guidelines and that patient and referee know what the process is going to involve (outcome 6); but we have processes in place to prevent and control infections and that our risk assessments are thorough and up-to-date (outcome 8) and so on for the 16 outcomes that require our compliance.

Dentistry is a profession; you are all professionals. It is of course worrying that the General Dental Council has had to increase its retention fee because, as it has reported, too many practitioners are appearing in front of its Fitness to Practice committees.

Care Quality Commission registration has the opportunity to be a great leveller or to be a tremendous boost to our practice as we can demonstrate not just compliance but excellence.

The key to professionalism is always founded in learning and good, if not best, practice; in not just an automatic 'I must do some CPD' attitude to training and education, but a focused resolve to learn and to put into practice all the necessary techniques to be a skilled implantologist, a brilliant carer for dental-phobic patients, a remarkable life-changing cosmetic dentist, or even just a completely competent, reliable and honest general dentist. While I'm doing that, perhaps you can spare a little time to ensure our practice teams know exactly what they have to do to respond to all the 16 CQC outcomes, live those every day, and frankly, they'll cost you almost nothing to implement and will benefit you greatly for many years. ■

Sim Goldblum is a partner in The Dentistry Business, providing university accredited and CPD training in Dental Practice Management and individual solutions to practices' on CQC, clinical governance and operational concerns. For more information call 0161 408 2030 or visit www.thedentistrybusiness.com