

practice management

The practice business

Sim Goldblum explains how to treat the most important patient – your practice.

Back from your summer holidays and with the prospect of a long autumn and winter stretching ahead, now is the time to start thinking about 2010.

When you go on holiday, do you pack your case and turn up at the airport wondering where to go? Unless you're the most spontaneous of people, that's highly unlikely. You and your family have probably

Start to focus on what you can change; next year.

done weeks of research scoured the internet for the best deals and have worked out exactly the best flight schedule, arranged the taxi to meet you at the airport, secured a room with a sea-view in the best positioned hotel, and you may even know where the best restaurants are, where the best souvenirs can be bought, and most importantly how much it all will cost.

So what's all that got to do with being a dentist? What's special?



Sim Goldblum

is a director of The Dentistry Business.

● Do you often put more effort into planning your holiday than you do your business?

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‘About 2010? I’m sure you have enough to worry about with the rest of 2009. It’s too late to do much about 2009, we’re over half-way through the financial year, your contract’s fixed or your marketing money’s spent, so you’d better make the best of what’s left and start to focus on what you can change; next year.

‘I’m a dentist!’

It’s really important you do what you’re good at and dentistry is often very satisfying. The way you worked so hard to persuade Peter to stop smoking has really benefited him and the rest of his family. That series of restorations you did for Louise were beautiful and she was so pleased she recommended you to three of her friends.

The points are though:

- Your bank manager has been asking to see you more often this year.
- Two of your staff are leaving because they don’t like working with you.
- The appointment book is looking rather sparse.
- Persuading patients to accept the new veneers you’ve learned how to do is much more difficult than you thought.

Let’s think about your practice and the way you see a new patient.

1. Take the medical history. You want to know what’s been happening

in your patient’s life, what medication they’re on and how they’re feeling. Then do the same for your practice. Talk to your accountant or adviser and get them to give you a potted history of the last two to three years and see what’s changed.

2. Examine the patient’s mouth.

Check for gaps, caries and check the gums because they’re the foundation for healthy teeth, and take some X-rays. Then do the same for your practice. What’s going well and not so well (talk to staff and

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patients and find out what’s really happening)? When was the last time the place was decorated, is it smart, is everyone professional, are you still seeing new patients, are you still able to draw enough money each month?

3. Make your diagnosis. Then do the same for your practice. Are the issues you’ve identified physical (premises, equipment), people (staff, patients, behaviours) or systems (processes and protocols, leadership and management)?

You may think you are too busy to do it all and want to know which of the steps is most important. But

if it was your patient, would you omit any of those steps? Probably not, and it’s the same with your practice.

If you think you are doing all right and your accountant/adviser tells you that total fees have been stable for the last three years, that costs have gone up by 20 per cent and total income is down, wouldn’t you want to change something?

If you realise your staff turnover has increased, that your associates aren’t generating enough fees to contribute to your costs and that patient numbers are down, would you recommend ‘no treatment, see me in six months’? Of course you wouldn’t, so start now:

- Call your accountant / adviser and ask for a two or three year review of the practice.
- Look at your most important indicators, they’ll vary but usually include: change in total fees and costs; fee generator by performer; staff turnover; growth in active patient numbers.
- Begin your diagnosis and prioritise the changes you want to make.

Then... start planning next year’s holiday. ■

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