

Don't be a 'Jack of all trades'

Lisa Bainham explains why outsourcing tasks can sharpen your role as a practice manager

I have been the practice manager of two practices in Cheshire for 21 years. With approximately 40 staff in total, I love the role – it's enjoyable, varied and challenging. During this time, as the size and responsibility of the role has grown, I've realised it's not fair or safe to expect an individual to take charge of all elements of running a practice. There are certain 'challenges' where I put my hand up and seek the help of external parties. The role of practice manager has evolved hugely over the time I've been doing it and you are expected to be something of a 'jack of all trades' at times – across marketing, human resources (HR), employment law, finance, business expansion, reception and possibly even some nursing thrown in. Of course, it's not possible for anyone to be 'master' of all these areas. In the case of employment law and HR for example, it is time consuming, often complex and the consequences of making a wrong decision – even if well intentioned – could be costly. Whilst I have an understanding of the law as it applies to HR management within a dental practice, I am no expert in the field so will not make decisions on such matters without first seeking counsel from someone who is. I use the team at FTA Law to provide me with advice on legal matters and they, in return, produce legal documentation.

Invaluable

Having the opportunity to call on a team of experts, as and when needed, is invaluable. Employment law, for example, is fast



Lisa Bainham has been practice manager at the Old Surgery Dental Practice in Crewe for 21 years and is now president of ADAM (Association of Dental Administrators and Managers).

changing and it's simply not possible for a practice team to remain up to date with all the nuances and subtleties of every change. This is where FTA's Oracle service comes in. The annual subscription service will give you sound, up to date, clear and impartial advice. By signing up to the service, subscribers can get access to the expert team of lawyers and call on their support to deal with matters as and when they arise, meaning clients can free their own time up to continue to focus on other matters in the practice, safe in the knowledge that any employment law issues are in hand".

Clients subscribing to the service have unlimited access, via telephone, to a team of legal experts who have a detailed knowledge of employment law and specialise in many of the issues faced in running a dental practice, therefore creating bespoke contracts and staff handbooks that are fit for purpose and specific to my practices needs.

We recently revised and re-issued our employee handbook, and sought FTA Law's help with the content, which covered everything – from disciplinary issues to contractual changes and recruitment processes. Whoever you decide to work with should feel part of the practice team, and be professional, efficient, approachable and work seamlessly with everyone on the project. You should never feel awkward about asking what you think might be 'silly questions'. Any reputable company will recognise that you aren't experts and should explain things clearly and logically, without just handing you a template to complete. I certainly wouldn't claim to be an expert now, but I feel better equipped and have learnt a lot from using an external party to assist with the legal matters involved in practice management.

Contract out

I think all practices, irrespective of size, should consider contracting out roles they don't have the skills to perform themselves. Whoever you choose should have many years' experience supporting practices and be available to update and train the team in the latest developments on a regular basis.

I wouldn't want to make legal decisions on behalf of the practice without first consulting an expert who is better placed to advise of the possible consequences of that decision. We face many challenges in dental practices that are not in the slightest bit related to the practice of dentistry. To deal with these situations, you need to work with individuals who have the relevant knowledge and the time to ensure the practice is fully supported and guided. As a practice manager, it is sometimes necessary to make difficult decisions or changes within the practice and I feel that as our team know we are guided by an industry expert, there is no misunderstanding regarding adherence to practice requirements. Not only has it helped us avoid problems and keep 'on the right track', I'm convinced the clarity and comprehensive nature of the content of our employee handbook has also helped morale in the practice.

All about ADAM

The Association of Dental Administrators and Managers (ADAM) represents all members of the dental administration team, whatever the job title. ADAM recognises that each and every administrative role is vital to the smooth and efficient running of a busy dental practice. There are various benefits to joining the association, which can be found on their website www.adam-aspire.co.uk

ADAM

Association of Dental Administrators and Managers

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