



Have you ever undertaken a practice appraisal? If the answer's no, read on, because you could be missing some important opportunities, as **Lina Craven** explains

Put your practice through its paces

We've all read often enough about the necessity for appraisals: how they keep the team motivated and on track, provide the opportunity to discuss and rectify management issues, identify better work practices, improve opportunity, and of course facilitate development and growth. And while all of that is true for staff appraisals, what I am actually referring to is the appraisal of your practice. If you have never undertaken a thorough practice appraisal, how do you know where your opportunities lie and how can you possibly take advantage of the myriad of associated benefits that result from a fresh perspective.

Do you follow best practice?

Unless you sat down on day one and meticulously planned your practice's

long-term development – systems and procedures based on best practice, comprehensive job descriptions and competence documents for each role as it would be introduced, marketing communications based on target groups, and so on - your business approach has probably just evolved over time. And if asked why you do something in a particular way, the most likely response is – 'just because' or 'we've always done it this way'.

Most businesses evolve naturally. We all start off with the best of intentions but trying to combine the demands of growth with managing the day-to-day is difficult. In such circumstances we tend to introduce new systems and procedures in direct response to a need rather than a pre-determined grand plan that represents best practice. The result of our haphazard approach is that

we use methods that do not support our overall goals for customer excellence.

A fresh approach and a different perspective

The tell-tale signs are visible in many practices I visit: inefficient scheduling, no new patient process to speak of, a worn-out-looking environment, people who don't work together as a team and so on. In most cases, habits (bad habits) inhibit the team from seeing what's wrong and what changes are required to make improvements. To get things moving we need a fresh approach and a different perspective.

A practice assessment is a fresh pair of eyes focusing on the objectives your practice is aiming to achieve. Its purpose is to give feedback on current working practices and





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culture, to pinpoint opportunities for improvement and to highlight excellence where it exists. Most importantly it is a chance for the practice (team) to focus on the things that really matter and to begin the changing process.

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As an example, given the objective to improve the scheduling process in one practice recently, independent observation and analysis revealed the opportunity to reduce the working week by half a day at the same time as increasing private patient time allowing for a private growth potential of 15%. In addition it was feasible to meet the NHS contract within a 10-month period and rearrange the assistant's diary making a dramatic saving on salary of £16K per year. Most importantly all of this was possible while retaining the excellent patient care the practice thrived upon!

owners. An assessment isn't about adding to your list of jobs or simply highlighting areas of concern and leaving. It should result in an action plan with a set of timely objectives.

As business academic and author Peter Drucker said, 'Objectives are not fate; they are direction. They are not commands; they are commitments. They do not determine the future; they are means to mobilise the resources and energies of the business for the making of the future.'

Choose to invest in a thorough appraisal of your practice and make the future you envisage happen. [PD](#)

The process of change

Growth and improvement begins with the desire to develop and the commitment to make it happen. Any appraisal is worthless without the support and contribution of all parties so the process of practice appraisal begins with an initial meeting with the practitioner and management team to discuss the practice – the team, their needs and the vision. Objectives for the assessment are agreed upon. Most importantly the process is explained thoroughly and commitment from the practitioner and management (team) is sought.

To him that watches everything is revealed

Over a one or two-day period the assessor observes key aspects of the practice across five crucial areas: leadership, team dynamics, approach to patients, systems and procedures, and the overall practice eg. aesthetics, environment, equipment etc.

An old Italian proverb states that 'to him that watches everything is revealed' and such is the case here.

Expert input

When I decided I needed to get fit I sought the advice of a qualified fitness trainer. After hearing odd sounds coming from underneath my car's bonnet I visited my local mechanic and when my son was feeling unwell recently I took him to the doctor. Each one of these people is a specialist. He or she possesses the knowledge to help me to overcome my problem and achieve my goal.

It's no different with your practice. If you are going to invite in a fresh pair of eyes, make sure they are attuned to identifying where positive change can take place across all facets of the business – clinically and commercially. Someone who can combine peripheral and hands-on experience is ideal.

Taking a step back

In any business it is important to take a step back and assess where you are currently and where you want to be in the future. With the rapid pace of change our industry is experiencing, it is especially pertinent for practice

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Lina Craven is founder and director of Dynamic Perceptions. Over the past 25 years, she has assisted orthodontic practices to realise their vision of success through the achievement of a customer-driven culture that focuses on delivering an exceptional patient journey.

As the only consultant in the UK specifically focused on orthodontic practice, and possessing genuine practice-related experience, Lina's advice is relevant, practical and proven to get results.

Lina Craven will be speaking at Private Dentistry 07 on 30 November at Central Hall, Westminster, London. For more information or to book your place, call event organiser Independent Seminars on 0800 371652 or visit www.independentseminars.com/pd2007. As a subscriber to *Private Dentistry*, you will qualify for a 10% discount on this event!

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