



It's open season on new graduate dentists

By Simon Palmer and Dr Phillip Palmer

We are at that time of year when the dental schools give their latest batch of final year students their degrees and the graduates go out into the world looking for jobs as dentists. Some practices will be eager to employ these graduates while others will be holding back waiting for an experienced dentist to employ.

Graduate dentists bring with them different benefits and concerns to a dental practice and as such their induction and ongoing work needs to be treated differently to an experienced dentist entering a practice.

The benefits of hiring a graduate

A graduate's lack of experience is going to mean that they are going to be slower, have less honed clinical skills and be less proficient at dealing with staff and patient problems than a senior dentist. However, when deciding whether to hire a graduate it is important to look at the benefits of doing so as well. These include:

1. Sometimes it is easier to train compatible professional behaviour in a graduate than to un-train undesirable behaviour in a senior dentist. Senior dentists are more likely to be set in their ways, less willing and less able to change their established ways of doing things
2. One of the major stages a person will take in their personal development is when they learn to be a teacher and leader of others. For some people this will extend no further than with their own kids.
There's something about teaching a younger member of your profession some of the lessons that you have learnt during your time as a dentist that provides a very empowering and warming sensation. This may be because you were helped in your early days by someone more senior, and want to complete the circle by 'giving back' and become the teacher. or because you wish you were helped in those days. It may also be because you have been fortunate in your career and want to give back to the community that gave you the opportunities you've had.
3. You could also possibly set yourself up with an eventual purchaser of equity in your practice where selling options may otherwise be limited. Many dentists that we know have ended up eventually 'buying in' or 'buying out' the practice that they started with after graduation.
4. Many practices comment that a new grad can bring with them a vibrancy and enthusiasm for the practice of dentistry that had faded over the years in the dentists in the practice. This enthusiasm and vibrancy when it occurs brings with it new light to the practice. It is great for the morale of not only the principal and existing dentists but also for the auxiliary staff and of course the patients.

5. New Grads also bring with them a knowledge of new ideas in dentistry, modern techniques equipment and materials which may not have been previously offered at the practice. If an employer chooses to embrace these things it will surely help the practice to remain fresh, up to date and to continue to evolve.

The induction of a graduate into the practice

Women have a well known and often repeated complaint about men not asking for directions when they are lost. This complaint reveals something about human nature that employers need to be wary of (and not just about men). Many people feel that it is a sign of weakness to say that they need help advice or guidance. They will stumble around trying to work things out for themselves and will be reluctant to ask for help. Graduate dentists are inexperienced by definition and they will need guidance in their relationships with staff members, their interactions with patients and of course their clinical skills.

If we were hiring a graduate, we would be infinitely more concerned if they were not asking questions than if they were. If they were asking for assistance I would feel like I knew where the graduate was having problems and I could provide advice or assistance. If they were not asking questions, there is no way that I would think they had none. I would assume they were stumbling around when unsure about how to handle a situation. When you trust someone to be handling your patients you don't want them stumbling around.

When you employ a graduate you need to make sure that it is established from the beginning that it is ok to ask for help and that it is expected that the graduate will need to do so. Recognising that you don't know something and having the maturity to ask for assistance when you need it, needs to be viewed as signs of strength of character and not weakness.

Any practice employing a graduate should set up a regular weekly session where the senior dentist or principal meets with the graduate. Ideally this should be for about half an hour a week to review cases, discuss any clinical or other issues that he is having within the practice and mentor their development. This little time put aside will have a huge impact on the practice in that:

- It will decrease the stress levels in the graduate,
- It will increase the graduates loyalty to both you and the practice,
- It will give you piece of mind that the patients that you have entrusted to this graduate are in good hands,
- It will bring to light any issues that the graduate has before they become a huge problem.

Empathy

It seems to be difficult for many senior dentists to be empathic with graduate dentists. It may be a while since they themselves graduated and perhaps they can't put themselves in the graduates' shoes and remember what they were like when they graduated.

If you are going to hire a graduate dentist, empathy is vital. It is too easy to compare the graduates work with your own and find fault. It is important to remember that the comparison is an impossible standard and being green at the beginning of their career doesn't mean that this graduate won't grow into being a fine dentist. They may even have the potential to be a better clinician than you given some time, experience and guidance.

Without empathy your early criticism may spoil a working relationship with someone who may have become an excellent future dentist, partner and or purchaser of your practice.

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