

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE CASE STUDY:

CAMBORNE DENTAL PRACTICE



Background

Size:	13 staff
Sector:	private/NHS dentistry
Locations:	Camborne, Cornwall
Status:	First recognised as an Investor in People in May 2004. Successfully re-assessed, May 2007.

Overall impact

"Investors in People has given us systems for encouraging the best out of our staff, for delivering the highest quality of care to patients - and ultimately for raising the performance of the business."

Karen Williams, Practice Manager

The organisation

Camborne Dental Practice was purchased in its present form in 1990 by dentist Christine Ettling as a long-established NHS surgery in Chapel Street. Dentist Joanne Paynter joined shortly afterwards.

Following changes to NHS contracts, the practice became essentially private in 1994, while retaining NHS care for children.

"The dentists wanted to be able to offer a wider choice of care and treatments than was possible under the NHS contracts," Karen Williams says.

Camborne Dental Practice underwent further considerable change in 2003 when associate dentist Joanne Paynter acquired the business from Christine Ettling, who remained as an associate.

From renting the ground floor of the end-terraced property in Chapel Street, the practice acquired both floors of the building outright.

Karen Williams, who had joined the firm as Assistant Practice Manager in 2002, was appointed Practice Manager. A third dentist, Claire Shaw, joined the practice in 2004.

Camborne Dental Practice has continued to expanded significantly, delivering dental treatment, preventative care, cosmetic dentistry and oral hygiene to 3,000 patients, most of whom live in the immediate local area.

The challenge

When Karen Williams was recruited as Assistant Practice Manager in 2002, she found a business in need of radical overhaul.

"We occupied just the ground floor of the building. We only had the two surgeries, with a dentist and the hygienist having to share on alternate days.

"Morale was low. The practice was losing staff and was in quite a bad way. The roll of patients was static and we were limited in what we could offer. Staff went on courses, but there were no real systems or objectives for staff development.

"We weren't computerised at all. So in all these different ways, the practice needed bringing into the 21st century."

The strategy

Following her subsequent appointment as Practice Manager, Karen Williams began working closely with Investors in People adviser Annette Rigby to introduce systems for building a successful business.

"Working towards Investors in People gave us structures for improving the practice, " Karen Williams says.

"The first thing we did was team-building and then to get a business management system into place, as part of a fully computerised practice.

"I`d worked previously at a dental surgery, so I knew what a well-run practice should be like.

"I introduced regular practice meetings and more social outings for everyone. I changed the sort of language we used to the patients. We had, for example, a `swear box` for people using the word `check-up` instead of `examination`. We all ended up throwing money into the box which we put towards a staff party.

"None of this was too difficult because staff were happy to be involved in different and more effective ways of working."

The new principal Joanne Paynter and her practice manager also used Investors in People as a tool for creating a business plan, covering areas such as cash flows, patient recruitment and key performance indicators.

"It`s a working model for the practice and we use it every day," Karen Williams says.

The practice has also introduced a system of appraisal to help identify training needs. As well as continuing professional development (CPD) for the dentists and additional qualifications for the dental nurses, the practice plans to encourage its nurses to train in oral health education in order to work with patients in a newly created Education Room.

"We`ve also focused on ethical sales training," Karen Williams says.

"Staff learn ways of discussing treatment options and to help find patients find the most affordable plans and financial product for paying for their care. It demonstrates our commitment to work in the patient`s best interests, both clinically and financially."

The results

Now fully computerised and operating on both floors, the expanding Camborne Dental Practice has achieved considerable business benefits from its commitment to the good practices of Investors in People.

Both turnover and profitability have improved significantly in the past three years, with an average gain of 20 new patients every month, against a target of 17 new patients per month.

Meanwhile, the training initiatives in ethical selling and the use of a financial product have brought additional income into the practice.

The practice has also become more efficient - with fewer missed appointments which has led to better use of dentists` time.

“Staff are happier, more knowledgeable and more confident in their jobs and have a much greater idea of their role in the success of the practice, “ Karen Williams says.

“It`s all based on good leadership and investing in our people – and this continues to pay dividends for us.”

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