

Background

Size: 23 staff

Sector: Dentistry

Locations: Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire

Status: First recognised as an Investor in People in July 2004. Successfully reviewed against both Investors in People and the Profile version of the standard, December 2006.

Overall impact

“Investors in People is now very much a part of the working life at the practice. There is tremendous enjoyment in learning and sharing good practice throughout our team – which in turn means a successful and profitable business that delivers wide ranging and high quality dental care.”

Shaenna Loughnane, Practice Manager

The organisation

Dentist Phillip Loughnane and his wife Shaenna founded the Chipping Manor Dental Practice in Wotton-under-Edge in 2001 after acquiring a long established practice in the town. Phillip was already well known among local people from his work with another surgery in Wotton. Starting with just the one dentist and two part-time nurses, the practice grew rapidly. Now employing six dentists and re-located to a larger surgery in the town centre, Chipping Manor is the only practice in Gloucestershire that continues to accept new NHS patients.

“We now have 14,000 patients,” Shaenna Loughnane says.

"But Wotton has only a population of 8,000, so we`re drawing 57% of our patients from outside our local area - from places like Tewkesbury and Gloucester."

The challenge

By 2004, Chipping Manor Dental Practice was finding that rapid growth was bringing its own issues.

"We were still a comparatively new business, but we had this increased number of employees which we had to turn into a team. Managing the growth and building and maintaining a team culture was our biggest challenge, " Shaenna says.

"We needed to put some processes into place. Our systems for recruitment needed refining. Our procedures for appraisal and induction were very basic. Training was a part of the practice, but we needed to record it properly.

"People needed to be aware of the part that they all play in the success of the business."

The strategy

In committing to the Investors in People standard in April 2004, Chipping Manor Dental Practice worked with an adviser to develop training plans that were closely linked to its business aims.

"The major strategy was based on empowerment, inclusiveness, recognition and reward – all of which was underpinned by our ongoing commitment to training, "Shaenna says.

"We even bought each of our staff a tree to grow in their gardens, so they could watch it grow, as they grew with the practice.

"Staff became more closely involved in every decision, so they now know exactly where we are financially - and everyone has their individual goals, objectives and KPIs."

The practice developed a five-year plan for the future growth and staffing of the business. New appointments included a Nurse Manager, Pam Parslow, and a Reception Manager, Fay Robertson.

"With Pam and Fay in post, we were able to create small teams within the big team," says Shaenna.

"These two managers are able to look after individual training and to help with appraisals and job chats because I couldn't do it all."

Nurses now have opportunities to become Oral Health Educators, which qualifies them to give `1 to 1s` with patients on topics such as eating, brushing and care of teeth.

"Our dental nurses are either training to be Oral Health Educators or learning to be Radiographers, which means they can take X-Rays of patients, without the dentist having to be in the room.

"The dentists are then freed up to give treatment. It makes the whole process faster and more efficient – and it means dentists and nurses work more closely together as a team."

The Investors in People adviser also encouraged the practice to pursue Profile accreditation

"Although we had our five-year plan, we didn't know how good it was until we did this process of benchmarking ourselves against more rigorous criteria," Shaenna says.

"And it really got all our business systems and strategies into one place. Business principles now run through every policy and strategy that we have."

The results

The business benefits have been considerable.

As well as becoming more profitable and more efficient, the practice has enjoyed zero turnover of staff for the past 18 months.

Training programmes have enabled the practice to extend its range of services, in areas such as cosmetics and mouth cancer awareness.

A recent patient survey has revealed 99% approval of the way the practice is run.

"We received `yes` replies to questions on everything from how helpful the nurses were to finding the reception welcoming and warm," Shaenna says.

"When NHS dentistry changed on April 1, 2006, some 70% of dentists went private. We stayed within the NHS, so our training has been all about making that work. We`ve got through it. We`re still making a profit and we`re still taking new NHS patients – and it`s all down to staff commitment and training."

Chipping Manor`s ethos of social responsibility extends way beyond its commitment to NHS dental care.

The practice actively supports Bridge2Aid – a charity in Tanzania that treats life-threatening teeth and gum infections. As well as sending its dentists to work in the country, the practice gives 10% of its private patient income to the charity.

"Our involvement with Bridge2Aid has been a fantastic motivator and team-builder. It`s given us another focus and everyone is delighted."