How have they accomplished this? Through creating a collaboration based on mutual support, flexibility and constant communication, according to the key stakeholders involved: Jo North, executive director of In Touch Care; Lisa Roche, lead internal quality assurer (IQA) for dental nursing at In Touch Care; Caroline Khehra, owner and practice manager of Hurlfield Dental Practice.

Working without any conflicts

Caroline began working with In Touch Care as the traditional methods of obtaining dental staff for her three NHS practices were proving problematic. ‘In our experience, we have found that recruiting a qualified dental nurse has many pitfalls – mainly their adaptation to the way our practice operates and the procedures we follow – and they have struggled to adapt to a new style of working,’ said Caroline. ‘Therefore, taking on an apprentice without any prior knowledge or experience working within a dental practice allows us to teach our style of working without any conflicts.’

Lisa, who is Caroline’s main point of contact at In Touch Care, also views apprenticeships as a great fit for Hurlfield Dental Practice. ‘Caroline is very keen on the service they provide to their patients, and she feels the best way she can give that service is to train their own apprentices,’ she said. ‘There has never been a time when we haven’t had apprentices in Hurlfield. We offer across-the-board provision.

‘Caroline also likes to add additional parts to her training, in-house, so the service they provide to their patients is really outstanding. She often likens it to going into a five-star hotel – that’s how you should feel when you enter their premises.’

Open and honest relationship

‘The partnership works well and has done from the outset,’ said Caroline. ‘I think I can safely volunteer that it is our open and honest relationship which has cemented our working relationship with In Touch Care.

‘Recruiting is simple, and the process of getting the learners enrolled is just a phone call, and everything happens in practice, which obviously takes out the time and hassle involved in releasing a learner to the In Touch offices.

‘The classroom-based learning has minimal impact on our business and the majority of learning takes place on-the-job, as we assign a mentor to oversee all aspects of the learner’s development until they reach a level of competence whereby they can work unassisted in practice.’

Even the programme’s day-to-day details are navigated easily, on both sides.

‘It’s a very open-door policy, in that our assessors have great relationships with all the practices, so they all negotiate times to meet, and Caroline releases them into college,’ said Lisa. ‘The managers are happy to make those negotiations with the assessors. Everybody works really well with us.’

A solid partnership spells success for a dental practice, training provider and apprentices

For the last decade, training provider In Touch Care and Hurlfield Dental Practice have exemplified the open, trustworthy partnership that is vital to cultivating new talent, establishing a loyal team and achieving organisational growth.
Supportive of ideas and programmes

Aside from sourcing new hires, In Touch Care and Hurlfield are also happy to embark on new projects or different ways of working together.

‘Hurlfield has always been very supportive of any sort of new areas that we want to go in. They’re also very supportive of the students,’ said Lisa. ‘Even when it’s been things we’ve needed as a training provider – where we’ve wanted to do a bit of filming to use as resources – they’ve been quite happy for us to come in and do that.’

‘It’s always been a two-way street,’ added Jo. ‘Caroline leads from the top and she’s very hands-on. We had an opportunity of doing a large, national contract, and Caroline came along with myself and Lisa to meet with the organisation, where she spoke extremely highly of the partnership and working together over the years.’

Any problems tackled head-on

‘In Touch Care are easy to contact and efficient in their approach to all communication,’ said Caroline. ‘If we or In Touch Care have any issues or concerns, they will be listened to immediately and acted upon in an efficient and appropriate way.’

Clear and open discussion is indeed key to overcoming any obstacles, confirms Lisa.

‘We very rarely have any issues because the communication is always there,’ she said. ‘We understand each other quite well, and I’ve got a really good relationship with Caroline – if anything ever does come up, I am her first point of call and she’s mine, and we just deal with it head-on the majority of the time.

‘It just makes it so much easier, because with some practices that we have worked with – now and in the past – the communication breaks down. Practice managers are generally all quite busy people and that’s the concern with most dental practices. But Caroline’s got a really good trust in us as the provider, and we trust her as an employer.’

Exciting times ahead

With the recent approval of higher apprenticeships in dental nursing, practice management and dental hygiene – previously only available as full-time university qualifications – apprentices will now be able to train and progress in practice, without having to stop work.

‘That’s going to be huge for dental nurse progression,’ said Lisa. ‘And Hurlfield are quite keen on the new qualifications, especially the dental practice management, because their site managers are home-grown managers who don’t have a qualification.’

‘We’ve now got access to European Social Fund and these new opportunities for workforce development, and we’re about to start off Hurlfield’s programme in relation to that,’ said Jo. ‘Caroline has moved forward with all the opportunities that we’re developing.’

Whatever prospects the future brings, they will no doubt be welcomed and supported by a strong collaboration between the two organisations.

Clear and open discussion is indeed key to overcoming any obstacles” Lisa

‘As we have had a good working relationship with In-Touch – who facilitate the recruitment of the right individuals – we have a loyal team which are all pulling in the same direction,’ said Caroline. ‘As most are either undertaking the apprenticeship or have been through it successfully, they are working in-line with the current guidance and are able to support the new learners. And as the majority are a young team, they have lots of enthusiasm and energy, which is reflected in their role.

‘We can attribute some of the success of our business to the involvement of In Touch Care in the facilitation of the recruitment of the right individuals and the appropriate training received by those individuals from In Touch Care.’

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