

Combatting the loneliness of practice-owning dentists

Linda Giles and Nathan Poole comment on importance of having a confidante who understands dentistry

The story of a practice owner who was treated so badly by her new colleagues that she felt depressed and suicidal is a painful one to read.

In this article, we share a summary of her experience along with some perspectives on the key issues for practice-owners. You can find the full account published in the latest journal of the DDU (<https://tinyurl.com/DDUJournal>), whose support for the dentist was invaluable.

In essence, this experienced clinician, who was a Clinical Advisor to NHS England and had been a training programme director for Health Education England, bought a practice to be near her elderly parents. She had agreed that the vendor should stay for three years, a decision she came to regret since, from the start, her new colleagues worked against her rather than with her.

The dentist initially brought in a practice manager, so she had one member of the team who became her ally – but the two of them were still outnumbered.

The hostile actions of the staff included:

- Gathering into huddles from which the practice owner and practice manager were excluded
- A complaint against the dentist to NHS England
- Going through the records of her patients without consulting her
- Raising concerns with the Care Quality Commission

At NHS England's request, the dentist had to step aside as a Clinical Advisor but, undaunted, she recruited more staff, increased her hours, and continued working to build the practice.

After working for 18 months with the complaint hanging over her, feeling



Nathan Poole and Linda Giles

alone and in the wilderness, she sought the help of the BDA and the Dental Defence Union (DDU).

Then, the NHS England area team requested 120 patient records should be supplied for review. This amounted to around 1,000 documents! No evidence was found for any of the allegations but despite this, her case still had to be considered by the Performance Advisory Group (PAG). This is a panel of local people who investigate when there are concerns about a clinician on the NHSE performers' list.

Once again, she got help through the process from the DDU. She was finally vindicated by the PAG, which found no evidence for any of the allegations, described instead as "vexatious."

Now, she wants no-one else to go through a similar experience.

With this in mind, we have some questions and observations that might help dentists who risk being in a similar situation when buying a practice.

You need to ask yourself the following:

- How are you going to get the new team on side – bearing in mind the practice acquisition is usually kept confidential until contracts are signed?
- What do you do if you find yourself competing with the former owner of the practice for the loyalty of the dental team?
- How do you assert yourself in this situation and win the staff over?
- Should you minimise the time that the former owner stays in the practice – a year at the most to provide continuity perhaps?
- As part of your analysis of the business, it's worth considering the staff you need. Long-standing staff can be very resistant to change. If you feel there are excess staff or staff paid above their worth, you can request that the vendor makes them redundant before the purchase is completed.

We work very closely with our clients and there are some predictable stress points when it comes to acquiring a dental practice, and the weeks before and after the purchase are critical.

Running a business can be a lonely place, so having the support of a business advisor can be invaluable. Personnel issues are a big part of our discussion with clients.

If she had been our client, we would have suggested reviewing the contract she was about to sign to ensure it makes sense for the business, and that it gave her flexibility to make changes. We also hope we would have been able to steer her to take action before the hostility of the staff became intolerable. We see ourselves as confidants as well as business advisors and would not have wanted her to be so isolated and alone.

Possible steps she might have taken (although hindsight makes everything simpler than it ever is in reality):

- Promptly announce an away day at which you get to know everyone – or training opportunities – so staff know you want to invest in them
- Identify someone – like your accountant or a dental practice mentor – that you can confide in and who will guide you through the decisions you should make for you and your business

Whatever you do, don't feel you cannot get help. According to the DDU article, not only did this dentist survive her ordeal, she transformed a run-down four-surgery practice into a thriving eight-surgery practice with great patient reviews.

She paid a high price, but she has been totally vindicated. ■

Why use micro influencers in your marketing strategy

Get the most out of your local influencers

You may have heard about social media influencers and how they are benefiting the dentistry world. The influencer industry is worth an estimated \$21bn (US) worldwide, with 100% growth in the last year. With 90% of millennials using social media, you can see why using influencers would be a popular marketing campaign.

But it's not just about getting someone in and getting them to post, it is essential to have a good marketing goal and process.

The difference between an influencer and a micro influencer

The definition of a micro influencer often differs, but generally anyone with between 3,000 and 100,000 followers/subscribers is a micro influencer,

whilst anyone with more than 100,000 followers is classed as an influencer.

For dentistry, we'd suggest anyone between 3,000 and 50,000 followers and the reason is this:

- The lower end of micro influencers are most likely working with fewer brands, meaning more time for you
- They are more likely to reply to comments and engage in messages and with their community
- It's also likely that their followers are local to them
- You can grow with them; look after them and they will look after you, therefore building a strong relationship

We recommend using micro influencers over influencers because, according to a recent study, 82%

of consumers are 'highly likely' to follow a recommendation made by a micro-influencer.

Why? Because they have formed a relationship built on trust, friendship and honesty with their followers and because of this they deliver high engagement rates.

In addition, they are good for budgets. You don't need a nationwide influencer. A local micro influencer will work better to help you increase your goals, which ultimately means more patients through the door.

Free Guide

We have a FREE influencer guide and strategy booklet to help plan out your goals, budgets and contracts with your influencers. We have recently



seen one local (micro) influencer boost profits by nearly £17,000 for one dental practice we worked with in Scotland, and she only had 21,000 followers. ■

About the author
Jay Dickens - Social Media Manager at Connect My Marketing - Meta and Google Certified

