

# Finding a perfect balance

**Wasif Khan** explains how he took the leap into the world of private dentistry



Before I bought Holmes Chapel Dental Practice around 10 years ago, I had been working as an associate for several years carrying out private dentistry. I had undertaken extensive postgraduate study and was really enjoying the work I was doing, but I wanted to take the next step in my career to become a practice owner.

Holmes Chapel Dental Practice came with an NHS contract and, although this was a very different set up to what I had become used to, I decided to work with it, with a view to adding a private side in the future.

## Going private

Over the years my team and I have worked hard to develop the practice, but whilst I was able to maintain a degree of private work, there has always been that longing for me to return fully to private dentistry.

With falling revenues and the constant treadmill of UDAs, targets and restrictions that we all face under the NHS, I decided that after 10 years, the time had come to focus on providing a private service. I also wanted to slow down a little while practising better quality, varied dentistry; I needed to push myself to get out of the rut that I felt I was in, and I wanted the same for my team, too.

We had been building up to make the move towards a more private offering for around two years, so none of it came as a surprise to the team; I wanted to do my research and groundwork first to make sure I would take the right steps to make things work.

We decided that my two associates and dental therapist would continue to provide dentistry under the NHS, as well as private work, while I went fully private. The idea was to boost revenue in order to ensure not just staff

retention, but also team growth and skill set development, increased choice of materials and possible expansion and renovation in the future – things that I just could not consider while working on an NHS contract.

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## The right support

I have friends in their own practices who have incorporated a dental plan, and I had seen them in action during my time as an associate, so implementing one into the practice was always my intention. For me, it was vital that the provider I chose to partner with offered lots of support, because I had never carried out an NHS to private conversion as a practice owner and wanted to have the reassurance that there would be help available if I needed it.

I met with a few different companies to get a feel for what and who would work best for me and decided to go with Patient Plan Direct, as their service is great value for money and I also liked them on a personal level. They are a smaller company and the individuals who work there

are very down to earth and easy to get on with. On top of that, I really like their online portal and the fact that I was able to integrate the option of patient plan sign up via my website, too.

The first step was to write to our patients to let them know about the changes. This is where our main challenge cropped up, as I was finding that subsequent take up of the plan was quite slow. Theresa Riley, business development manager from Patient Plan Direct, was a huge help in this area. She came in to the practice and gave our reception team lots of training on how to discuss the plan and give patients options.

None of it is about a hard sell, it's all just about letting people know what is available to them and allowing them to choose what is best for their own needs, which fits perfectly in line with our own business ethos.

## It's all about letting people know what is available to them

Theresa also took a look at our letter, reworded it to make it more patient friendly and suggested that we add some more plan options to keep the choice more varied for patients, rather than just the one plan we were originally offering. All of her help provided us with the tools and knowledge we needed to make the difference.

It took some time to convince and educate some of the staff that this was the only way we could progress the practice, but now all of the team have embraced the methods Theresa discussed during her training, and they are all fully on board.

This external input from Patient Plan Direct made a huge difference to us, so I definitely feel that I made the right choice when selecting which plan provider to go with, particularly considering Patient Plan Direct's admin fees are so much lower than other providers, ensuring we retain more of our plan income.

## No regrets

I'm really pleased with how things have worked out. The team is focused and consolidated in our aims and we have also changed the infrastructure within the practice to accommodate private patients in reception and in a separate waiting area, which has created a unique patient pathway. The overall reaction from patients has been very positive, with many commenting that we should have done this years ago!

I have no regrets about making the move towards a more private dental offering; I have achieved a much better work-life balance, as it has allowed me to cut back on my hours, while still remaining busy during my 'dental' days, and my private patient list is ever increasing. I have to put a lot of this success down to incorporating a plan and doing the research into choosing the right provider for me, the support from patient Plan Direct has been second to none! **D**

Wasif Khan is the principal dentist and owner of Holmes Chapel Dental Practice in Cheshire.

Theresa Riley is one of Patient Plan Direct's business development managers with over 18 years' experience in the dental industry, incorporating both clinical and management positions.

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