

Taking the plunge

KARIMA BEAMISH tells us how Elmet Dental Care began their move from NHS to private dentistry...

MY husband, Julian Beamish, and Nick Britton have been partners at Elmet Dental Care for eight years and currently Nick is in the process of selling his share of the business to Julian. At the same time, I have come on board to help with the smooth running of things, so it's a really exciting time for us. Of course, it's also a little bit nerve wracking, but we both have lots of experience and it seemed like a great time for us to take the leap, so we did! Nick has also taken the decision to semi-retire and, as of April, he has scaled down his workload to three days a week, during which he only sees private patients, and their children under the NHS.

This gave us an immediate challenge to work on, because although Elmet Dental Care was already a mixed practice, we need to boost our private offering. However, in the space of just two months we've managed to turn this around so that we're now able to give patients a lot more choice about their dental care, while also providing the option to carry on being treated by Nick, privately. In just this short space of time we've converted more than 100 patients from NHS to private care, which I hear is pretty good going and we're very pleased with ourselves!

How did we do it?

I have to say, it hasn't really been a massively onerous task, thanks to the excellent support we have received from our plan provider. We decided to work with Patient Plan Direct after

meeting with them at one of the dental shows. I've worked with other plan providers in the past, at other dental practices, and having spoken to lots of companies we really felt as though we'd be in safe hands with Patient Plan Direct. They were never pushy and we found them to be far more approachable than the other options available. I think it's their openness and honesty really, it fits in with our own values and it just clicked that it would be the right option for us.

The first step was to write to all of our existing patients explaining everything that was happening within the practice. We worked with Patient Plan Direct on this – our business development manager – Carole Kitchen, was a huge support in helping us to get this right. In fact she's been there for us every step of the way. Of course, with implementing such a huge change we had our concerns and worries, so we spent a lot of time working on the letter until we were completely happy with it. I also included a chart to give our patients an easy visual to help understand the cost savings they could benefit from, and I think this really helped.

Carole came to the practice and spent an afternoon with our whole team, training everyone on the ins and outs of the new plan to make sure we were all on board and working from the same page. This was excellent and since then she's always been at the end of the phone any time we've needed her support. No question is ever too silly or too much trouble, so we've felt like we've been in

really safe hands all the way through.

Happy patients

Once we sent the letter out, all we had to do was wait. What we've found is that at each appointment our patients tend to arrive with their signed direct debit mandates ready to go, we've not had to worry about any hard sell at all, which is fantastic for the team. Thanks to Patient Plan Direct's low administration fees, we've been able to keep our plan prices down so that the plan is a complete no brainer. Patients can see this and are really happy that we're able to provide them with more choice through access to different types of dental treatments that they may not have been able to afford otherwise.

We're really honest with our patients, we're aware that a patient plan isn't for everybody, and we say this openly rather than trying to push them into a sale, that just wouldn't be fair. Our aim has been to provide a choice and that's how we want it remain, it has to be the patient's decision. We feel very lucky that our patients have embraced our private offering through the patient plan available to them.

I tend to liken the patient plan to a mobile phone contract, it makes it much easier for patients to understand and accept. By paying monthly for your mobile phone you get your calls and texts, but also better options on the handset, access to upgrades, all without having to pay for anything in one big chunk. A dental payment plan is similar really, you can pay for your care in smaller instalments, which

means it is much more manageable and you are eligible for discounts on other treatments too.

What does the future hold?

At Elmet Dental Care we still have our NHS contract, and it's wonderful to be able to offer more treatments and options of care to our patients. In the future we'd love to eventually be more private while still managing the dental needs of the people in our area under the NHS, but we definitely need to take things one step at a time. However, we have absolutely no doubts that our patient plan and partnership with Patient Plan Direct will help us get to that stage, we just need to be sensible, bide our time, and see how things pan out for now!

For anyone else thinking about converting from NHS to private dentistry, my advice would be that with the right plan in place there's no reason why you shouldn't take the plunge and go for it. Our patients have really seen the benefit in having a wider variety of choice and being able to offer them this through a plan that has been tailor made for our practice and with our patients in mind has allowed us to offer them this at an exceptional price. Added to that, I cannot fault the service and support we have received from Patient Plan Direct, it's been phenomenal! ■

Reader enquiry: xxx

About the author

Karima Beamish is the practice manager at Elmet Dental Care in Leeds.



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