

Dentistry Business

Stepping stones on the path to mastery

Bobbi Anthony looks at the future role dental therapists will be expected to play

Never has there been a better time to be a part of the dental profession worldwide. We are witnesses to an amazing transformation of products, procedures and materials. Changes in the UK are even more pronounced as huge numbers of dentists move away from NHS and other contract plans to all private or increased private practice.

With so many changes comes the opportunity to provide stronger and more aesthetic restorative options for patients. And, since many dentists are currently spending much time and money on continuing education courses in aesthetics, it's obvious that the future should bring many more opportunities for dental therapists to assist in the delivery of these services.

Also, keep in mind that the dentists aren't the only ones getting educated on aesthetics. Television reality programmes are educating the public for you on aesthetic dental options and how they can change lives and improve health.

In the US, innovation in aesthetic dentistry isn't the only news topic being disseminated to patients. Increased knowledge of the concerns related to periodontal infection is also a hot topic being written about more and more in magazines and newspapers.

Concerns that periodontal infection may put patients at increased risk for heart attack, stroke, respiratory disease and

premature births in women, all give us greater credibility in treating periodontal disease beyond just the risk of bone loss. How does all of this information translate for dental therapists in the UK? It means that you can be 'the right people in the right place at the right time'.

To my way of thinking, all of the above changes require us to change the way we practise and the way we interpret comprehensive care. No longer can we afford to look at the practice of hygiene, hygiene therapy, or better still, the practice of dentistry itself without looking at the 'bigger picture'.

In the past, the primary focus in the hygiene department has been oral hygiene and periodontal education and care; whereas, the focus of the restorative department has remained, for the most part, on restoration of teeth. This past segmentation by departments has created a tendency towards segmentation of care for patients in the general practice.

In order to best utilise hygiene therapists, a breakdown in this segmentation needs to take place.

As hygienists, our education has prepared us well for our past, primary focus but since the demands on us and our practices are ever expanding, we must be expanding our knowledge base as well. The curriculum in hygiene schools has been developed by

educators, building one level of

knowledge upon another.

However, once we have graduated and begun practicing, the responsibility for setting the curriculum for future growth is upon each of us individually.

This is the reason for continuing professional development requirements.

For instance, the education I received in hygiene school on occlusion was very cursory. Yet today, I understand that the oral apparatus is actually a system and one of the key links to understanding that system and the relationship between periodontal and aesthetic/restorative care is occlusion.

Without an understanding of the anterior component of occlusion or axial alignment of teeth, many functional reasons for aesthetic/restorative and periodontal care could be missed. So where can hygienists find courses that will build that next level of knowledge? Mastery of our profession is a journey and we must plan the itinerary and build the path.

Seeking education

Obviously, the dentists are in the same position we are.

Their journey towards mastery of comprehensive care has led many of them to seek courses and organisations that will enable them to build their skill level in newer, more innovative aesthetic/restorative techniques as well as a build a better understanding of the functional as well as the aesthetic reasons for procedures.

I am a team instructor for *The Aesthetic Advantage* hands-on courses for dentists and their teams put on by Independent Seminars, and I am also a consultant teaching hands-on in many practices, and I can tell you that there is a professional revolution going on in this country.

We have been educating dentists and teams for over five years in the UK.

Yet, I am so often disappointed by the attitude and shortsightedness of many hygienists and hygiene therapists here.

Often, they either prefer not to attend these types of training sessions provided by their dentists or cannot see attending if they aren't getting paid full fee for their time. Yet the cost for paying full tuition for themselves for such high-end courses might be prohibitive for them. I'm saddened that they don't always see the value to themselves, their career and their patients.

The cost for dentists attending many of these high quality continuing education courses is, for the most part, very high. In fact, with the *Aesthetic Advantage* courses, many of our UK dentist/participants travel to New York for their second or third levels after completing their London course.

The course itself is more than seven thousand dollars, add to that the cost of airfare, hotels, food etc and it becomes quite an investment. Yet, many of these dentists not only attend the

courses, they also bring their teams, paying for their tuition, travel and hotels. It doesn't take much thought to realise that they do this because they believe there is great benefit in the education and to themselves, the team and, most importantly, to their patients.

Many of these doctors have also turned to the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (BACD) and their founding organisation, the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) to give them the foundation and skills necessary for restructuring their practices and procedures.

The courses offered, and the accreditation process, have been designed to assist doctors in building a curriculum for mastery.

Still, the ability to create a successful practice depends on more than just the doctor's ability to perform the procedures. It requires a team of well-educated and dedicated professionals that also understand the bigger picture. Both the BACD and the AACD embrace hygienists as members of their organisations. It is not expensive to join and in joining the AACD, hygienists will receive the AACD Journal which has many articles that can benefit hygienists & team members including my own column dedicated to the Aesthetic Team. Both organisations also offer an extensive menu of high caliber educational opportunities for hygienists and auxiliaries at their scientific sessions.

And, as I'm sure you already know, participation in the BADI is an important component in your mastery journey. However, being a member in the organisa-

tion might just a good start. You might want to consider how important your active participation is. By remaining active – attending courses; participating in study groups and attending meetings where you can learn share and grow – you will have the opportunity to remain excited about the future of your profession and perhaps even influence the future.

Conclusion

I'd like to say that having worked with dental professionals in the US and the UK, it's not difficult for me to see the future of where UK dentistry is headed.

And the good news is that dental therapists are in position to be an integral part of that future. However, in order for dental therapists to maximise their participation and influence in the UK dental revolution, they will need to also invest in their continuing education and plan for the future. Just as dentists do not graduate from dental schools knowing all they will need to know to build a successful, high quality aesthetic/restorative private practice, dental therapists will need to learn more: to go beyond what they learned in school.

And, finally, it is important for them to align themselves with like-minded professionals, to work for practitioners who share their philosophy. All of this is part of our journey towards mastery of our profession.

In any profession, there will be those that do the minimum, there will be many that practice mediocrity but there will be a special few that will become masters of that profession.

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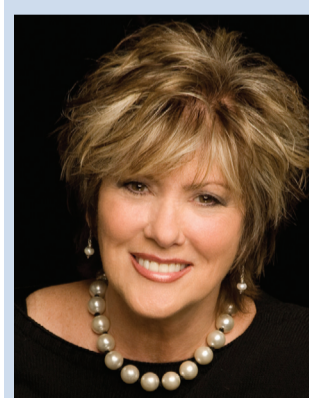
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With a passion for knowledge and a desire to enhance her profession, Bobbi Anthony has enjoyed more than 40 years in the dental field and has been a dental consultant for more than a decade in the US, UK and Canada. Bobbi is the founder and owner of Comprehensive Care Consulting Inc.

She is an international speaker and also writes a column for the AACD's Journal of Cosmetic Dentistry. Bobbi is a team instructor for *The Aesthetic Advantage*, Dr Larry Rosenthal's hands-on aesthetic continuum in New York, Palm Beach and London.

Bobbi Anthony is speaking at the World Aesthetic Congress (WAC) on 6 and 7 June 2008 at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London. To book your places please call 0800 371652 or visit www.independentseminars.com/wac.

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