

Therapist Foundation Training

Blog

Health Education Thames Valley and Wessex trains dental therapists of the future

With direct access opening up the market for dental care professions (DCPs), proper training and support for newly qualified therapists becomes even more vital. Pam Kaur the Training Programme Director for Health Education Thames Valley and Wessex Therapist Foundation Training Programme tells us about her experiences as a trainer and how the scheme supports both therapist trainees and the practices they work in.

Tell me about your background?

I have been a trainer for seven years, both for Dental Foundation Training (DFT) and Therapist Foundation Training (TFT). I have also recently become the Training Programme Director for the Therapist Foundation Training programme.

Why did you become a therapist trainer?

The TFT scheme was initially a pilot programme and I was already a DFT trainer. I worked in a high need area with lots of gum disease and needed to make sure patients had a stable dentition so I could do more advanced dentistry. The programme is now in its sixth year. It is proving invaluable and patients have benefited. I have been so pleased with the outcome that three years ago I appointed a trainee in my practice.

Tell me about the therapist foundation training programme?

Trainers and trainees are interviewed to be accepted onto the scheme. If successful, the trainees spend three days in practice and attend a study day once a month. Each study day covers a different topic, for example we have recently covered 'the future of dentistry and how the skills mix will work'.

TFT trainees tend to attend the study day jointly with Foundation Dentists (FDs). If dentists and therapists are encouraged to work alongside each other from an early stage, this can help to dispel myths about the role of therapists: focusing on team work, rather than the pecking order. Therapists are good at giving prevention advice and often better equipped to deal with children, so working with a therapist frees up FDs for more challenging work.

What do you think is good about the scheme?

The scheme is not compulsory, so the trainees that come to us really feel they will benefit. The trainees have different confidence levels, with some being very confident and some having little self belief. The trainers are rigorously interviewed and carefully appointed as they have to be able to bring the best out in people. We see trainees confidence build from month to month and term to term, preparing them to launch their career.

Are there any aspects you find challenging?

A small percentage of FDs perceive that therapists are taking their jobs. Their lack of experience became apparent at the last study day as there was gentle friction between the therapist trainees and foundation dentists. FDs should not be concerned as practices that employ therapists report positive experiences: therapists stabilise any perio, which then allows dentists to go on and do more advanced work.

As the profession moves forward, it is important that dentists embrace team working. Empowering staff and employing a broader skills mix allows practices to see patients more effectively. Dental Care Professionals (DCPs) can also often become an integral part of the Dental Team by administering Oral Health Advice and taking radiographs after appropriate training. This again will allow Dentists to take more time and care, delivering quality care that our patients rightfully deserve.

Why do you enjoy being a trainer?

I love the interaction with trainees. I practiced dentistry in the NHS for a long time, for four or five days a week with little interaction with peers. Being a trainer means I now get to meet other dentists and help the future generation. Some skills have taken five, ten or fifteen years to acquire, yet I can pass these on in twelve months, for example how to read and manage patient expectations. It is empowering and rewarding to be able to pass on skills. Being a trainer also has some more subtle effects, for example helping you to realise how

much you have developed as a person. As a trainer I have to continually keep abreast of changes, which helps with my own personal development.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

We are hoping to run a careers fair in the future to highlight the role of dental therapists. Dentists and the public are not aware of what therapists do, so it is important to educate people to ensure they have careers to go to and they don't slip back into hygiene rolls and deskill.

