

# Are you – and your practice – socially responsible?

Did you know that some people choose to do business with only organisations that demonstrate a commitment to the community? **Shaz Memon** reports

Dentistry is a care-giving profession in which trust, respect and empathy – alongside open communication – equate to successful clinical outcomes within a risk adverse environment.

But have you ever considered these qualities in a wider context? In other words, does the practice where you work demonstrate all of the above in a community – or even – global setting? Having a purpose beyond profit should be an integral part of any forward-thinking company. Indeed, 21<sup>st</sup>-century commerce now expects businesses to have an ethical approach to their operations, purchasing and behaviours.

This pre-requisite helps build positive relationships and develops a sustainable company. Investment in patients is all very well, but it is increasingly a ‘giving something back’ ethos that is influencing the decision-making process of many consumers.

The recent study, *Unlocking Customer-Inspired Growth*, revealed a blueprint for business success – and



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social awareness came top of the list. Companies demonstrating a social conscience fare better than those who do not, with millennials and Generation Z predicted to up to ante in the upcoming years. For these age groups in particular, they are choosing to place trust in brands

able and willing to show an all-essential ‘human touch’.

Empathetic actions do not go unnoticed – nor do companies (and those within them) with affiliations to charities, such as those that fundraise or offer time out in the community *pro bono*.

Arguably, there is a fine line between being *perceived* as socially responsible and genuinely caring. Authenticity is, therefore, important and dental teams would be wise to avoid the pitfalls that come with embracing too many causes at once and failing to deliver on any of them.

## Campaign

National Smile Month, Mouth Cancer Action Month, Dry January, Sugar Awareness Week and Go Sober for October are just a few key events in the dental calendar that provide dental teams with an opportunity to show their social responsibility. By taking time away from the practice – and getting out and about locally to raise awareness of oral health – it can potentially encourage more patients to seek care. Whether it is marked with an open day or a team commitment to ditch booze or sugar, promote your plans on your website and via all social media channels.

With the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry's nationwide drive to get every child to see a dentist before their first birthday – Dental Check by One – some practice teams are visiting under five centres, playgroups and primary schools to reach out to parents and caregivers.

Practices may support these campaigns by engaging with them on Twitter and Facebook, frequently re-tweeting and posting their messages and relating them back to relevant information on a practice website. In essence, demonstrate your social and oral health responsibilities by interacting and sharing key motivational and educational messages – both online and off.

## Charities

There are a number of dental charities that need your support. Dental Mavericks, Bridge2Aid and Dentaaid demand different things from you but, essentially, they aim to get people out of pain who otherwise may have little to no access to dental care – whether this is at home here in the UK or abroad. By volunteering to join one of their outreach trips or by donating dental essentials, a dental practice team can raise the bar in social responsibility activities and makes it relevant to the industry, too.

## Reduce. Reuse. Recycle

Signing up to the principles to reduce, reuse and recycle also shows that your practice takes environmental and sustainability responsibilities seriously. Green dentistry is a forward-thinking approach that reduces negative impact on the environment while supporting health and wellness – nothing is compromised. Effective waste segregation, efficient heating systems and the careful selection of dental consumables and so on can mean considerable cost savings. Additionally, the UK is aiming to reduce its carbon footprint by 80% by 2050, so it is important to play your part.

Social responsibility should form a part of any business plan and is particularly important in health care.

By taking an interest in social issues, it can lead to a healthier profit, healthier patients (globally as well as within the immediate community) and a better world in which we live. A statement about your practice's corporate social responsibility should be mentioned on the website and why not suggest a dedicated page that highlights your charity activities and community work?

Build a good reputation, always be authentic and do consider developing long-term relationships with charities. In addition to supporting worthwhile causes and behaving responsibly as a business, your actions also adds a 'feelgood' factor for those who receive their dental care from you and the rest of the team as well as for the team as a whole.

## Volunteering – a great leveller

In many parts of the world there is little or no access to dental care.

A lot of people suffer with the pain and suffering of toothache, abscesses and diseases.

Dentaaid is a charity dedicated to enabling people from disadvantaged communities around the world to enjoy relief from dental pain and access good oral healthcare. It supports oral health projects by supplying dental surgery equipment, portable dental equipment especially for rural areas and oral health education resources and training.

Dentaaid Overseas Volunteering Experiences offer an incredible opportunity for UK dental professionals to use their skills in other parts of the world. Working as part of a team you'll treat hundreds of people who have no other access to dental care. Most volunteering trips are one or two weeks long and you'll work alongside local dentists to run dental clinics in prisons, orphanages, refugee camps, community centres, churches, slum areas and remote villages.

SBDN ambassadors Jenny Jones and Baz Pattni embarked on a charity mission to Uganda last month, joining other volunteers with Dentaaid. You can read about their experience in next month's issue. The Society is keen to support and encourage student and registered dental nurses to get involved in charity work. Patron Fiona Ellwood says: 'Getting involved in charity work can be a great leveller in life and allows you to give back to society. We need to acknowledge that not everyone is fortunate enough to have access to dental care.'

Dentaaid is now looking for dental nurses to volunteer next year. The trips to Morocco take place 20-28 April and 12-20 October 2019 – the cost is £1,200.

Teams of 12 volunteers, including dentists, dental nurses, hygienists and therapists, will be based in Chefchaouen (April 2019) and Ouazzane (October 2019) in northwest Morocco and will be expected to offer basic pain relief dentistry, fissure sealant treatments, fluoride varnish programmes and oral health education

All volunteers should attend a familiarisation and training day ahead of their trip. The cost of this event is £20, which includes lunch and three hours' CPD. Training days are not included in the price of the trip. If you are looking to broaden your horizons and widen your dental experience, visit [www.dentaaid.org/volunteering/](http://www.dentaaid.org/volunteering/)

