

Creating the ultimate practice

By **Gary Bettis**, architectural director, Dental Design & Planning Consultants Ltd



A welcoming reception area leaves patients with a positive first impression

Patients are much more image conscious than they were a decade ago, and although patients may be spending less, they still expect clean, modern facilities and the highest standards in healthcare. Outdated facilities and a tired looking interior will do little to promote your practice. Furnishings and fittings become worn after about 10 years. Visual styles also change – so much so that even the most brilliant design in 1999 can simply highlight the age of your practice.

A practice relocation or refurbishment will give you the opportunity to completely overhaul the

image of your practice. It will also give you the valuable opportunity to review how your practice functions.

How do you achieve your ultimate practice?

The key to creating the optimum dental environment is to employ the services of an experienced dental practice designer. He/she will work with you to develop a design that will interpret your ideas imaginatively, maximise your investment, be economic to build and run, and, of course, help you to create an environment that is a pleasure to work in.

Design stages

1. Preparing an 'initial design'

The 'initial design' stage involves an interior designer refining a space plan that allows for traffic flow around the practice. Preliminary designs are prepared that explore potential layouts for the practice detailing proposed walls, space allocations, circulation paths and furniture configurations.

2. Securing the necessary approvals

Your designer will help to secure the approvals that will be needed before your project can go ahead. This includes the preparation of applications to the local authority for planning consent (which certifies that the project meets rules governing the use and form of buildings) and for building regulations certification (which covers the functional requirements of buildings to safeguard the health and safety of the people using them).

3. Preparing detailed design and working drawings

Building works associated with dental practices tend to be complex. If you are embarking on a medium to large scale project, especially one that involves structural alterations, it is essential that you obtain detailed drawings from a professional designer. It is difficult or almost impossible for a builder to accurately predict the cost of the work before drawings have been completed. A contractor may quote a low price initially and then add lots of extras as design information becomes available.

4. Interior décor

One important aspect that must not be overlooked is the interior décor scheme. How will your practice look? It is unwise to leave decisions regarding your colour scheme to the builder. A designer will ensure that your practice presents the right image. It is important to ensure that your patients are left with a lasting impression of your



Patient comfort must be a priority

practice so it would be a shame for the look and feel of the interior to be compromised by poorly chosen furniture, artwork and/or accessories.

5. Selecting the right builder

One of the many advantages of using a designer is the access gained to their pool of tried and trusted building contractors. If you do not have a builder in mind your designer will help you choose a contractor that has experience within the dental industry or demonstrates quality of workmanship within their portfolio.

He/she will send your design scheme (in the form of drawings and written schedules) to a small number of experienced building companies inviting them to quote for the work. This is a formal process called 'competitive tendering' and is the best way to create competition between the tendering builders. It ensures you receive the most competitive bids without compromise. It also offers a financial transparency that ensures you receive the best value for money.

6. Contract administration

Finally your designer will overview the building phase by monitoring progress and standards on-site. He/she will oversee the co-ordination of the building works through to its successful completion using a contract ('Contract Administration'). Contract Administration ensures that all the



A well designed interior maximises productivity

design plans are being adhered to and that progress is being made at the right pace. It is useful to allow the designer to be involved in this part of the project so they are on hand to make decisions about any unforeseen circumstances that will no doubt arise during the building process. It will also ensure that your project is not compromised in any way by builders cutting corners, re-designing the design scheme to their benefit or 'down-specifying' with inferior quality products.

Words of caution

Beware of entering into any contract that has been created by the builder as it may be biased in their favour. If you are contemplating this route make sure you fully understand the legal implications. If not, seek professional advice before signing on the dotted line.

You may be considering a company that offers to design and build your project. This may sound attractive with a single point of contact. However the 'design-build' approach commits you to the cost of construction, as well as the cost of design, much earlier than with the traditional approach. Any changes you make during design can be expensive, because they affect the whole of the design-build contract, rather than just the design team costs.

You may also find you have relinquished your opportunity to be involved in the development of your

design scheme. In short you get what you are given.

If you are considering this route make sure you advise the builder that you expect to receive a full set of drawings, schedules and proof of all relevant statutory approvals/consents. You can use this information to obtain your own comparative quotations.

The importance of good design

A great interior design for your dental practice does not happen by accident. It is a complex matter that needs a great deal of time and effort, and an ability to translate design ideas into workable solutions. Engaging the services of an experienced designer is the most stress-free approach. Knowing how to get the best out of your designer is the key to success.

It is advisable to choose a designer who understands dental practice ergonomics – look at their portfolio to assess their level of skill and creativity. This is a one-off opportunity for you to create a stylish and unique environment – it is important to get it right.

The end result must be a design that represents the values held by you, the practice owner and meets the expectations of your existing and future patients.

Contact: Gary Bettis
call: 020 8446 9946
info@ddpc.co.uk
www.ddpc.co.uk

