

The modern day dental nurse: record-taking clinics

Rachel Hughes has successfully implemented a nurse-led clinic at her practice based solely on using the extended Scope of Practice. Here she explains how the dental nurse can play an integral role in the delivery of Invisalign and other general dental practice orthodontic systems

Invisalign has to be one of the most exciting developments in modern day dentistry because as well as giving adult patients a route to dental confidence and happiness, it has the added benefit of being completely cosmetic as it is virtually invisible. Furthermore, with the procedure being freely available in general dental practice, it means it is an accessible service to patients. It has also helped to solidify, in my opinion, the role of an extended duty dental nurse. The stages involved in Invisalign, and indeed other short-term orthodontic systems such as Six Month Smiles, provide a unique role for a qualified and competent dental nurse.

How it all began

My impression training took place back in 2010 on a course I found by chance that was delivered by my local deanery. It was delivered in two sessions and looked at the ethical and legal considerations surrounding impression taking, a refresher on impression materials and oral anatomy and of course practical skills. After the course, it was up to me to further develop the skill.

I had a logbook to complete, in which I described in detail the impressions I had taken and provided a suitable grade as to the impression quality, thus allowing reflective learning. The dentists in my practice were acting as my mentor and helped me to develop the skill. I showed a natural flair

for impression taking and so the dentists were all unanimous that I should be allowed to take impressions. At this stage we were doing a lot of home whitening and mouthguard provisioning, which requires taking impressions.

It was around the same time one of our dentists, James Graham, was beginning to offer Invisalign treatment. It was proving very popular and James was very much in demand, however the initial stages involved in Invisalign can be time consuming. James decided it was time to advance my impression training to help free up time in his clinical diary. He mentored me in taking two-stage silicone impressions and a full set of extra and intraoral photographs. Once he was satisfied I was competent, he handed over the responsibility of the record-taking stage to me, stating 'you take much better impressions and photos than me'. This filled me with such positivity to take forward and make the experience work in practice.

The system

A complimentary consultation

We now feel we offer quite a 'slick' patient experience for anyone wishing to undertake teeth straightening in our practice.

At first enquiry, the existing or potentially new client is invited for a complementary consultation with myself or my colleague Sharmain. Sharmain has recently trained as a treatment coordinator and is also a qualified and registered dental nurse. At the complementary consultation we discuss all the offered orthodontic solutions—we also provide Six Month Smiles and Quick Straight Teeth. Our clients are made aware of each system and the commitment required when undertaking such a treatment. They are advised as to what to expect in terms of discomfort, caring for their appliance and their oral health during treatment.

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Figure 1. Trained dental nurses can take impressions for orthodontic appliances

Assess clinical suitability

Before proceeding with any treatment, the patient is seen by James (our registered Invisalign and Six Month Smiles practitioner) to assess if they are clinically suitable for treatment and the suitable orthodontic system we provide. It may even be that a referral to a specialist for more comprehensive orthodontics is required.

The patient then has all the relevant information regarding the different systems available to them, including the pros and cons associated with each system. They understand the commitment needed and the treatment cost.

Our practitioner has assessed their suitability and managed their expectations as to how long it will take to gain results. It is now up to the patient to make the decision.

They may have already made the decision and are keen to get the ball rolling, or they may decide to have some thinking time.

If the patient needs time to think we will arrange a follow-up call. Once the patient has decided they want to start treatment, we move to the record-taking stage.

The record-taking stage

Imagine you have made the decision to go ahead with the orthodontic treatment offered to you and you wish to book the next treatment stage. Keen to get started, the appointment you are offered is four or five weeks away, even possibly longer. Leaving the

appointment, you are feeling deflated or frustrated that you are unable to progress sooner. You may even decide to shop around for the treatment and consider going elsewhere. But to be offered an appointment that same week or within seven days would exceed your expectations, wouldn't it? This is more than possible to do when you have a trained and competent nurse available to deliver this stage of the treatment, as is the case in my practice.

Dependent on the system, a patient will be booked with myself for a full set of extra and intraoral photographs and either:

- Alginate impressions for study models for Six Month Smile or Quick Straight Teeth. This is followed by two-stage silicone impressions a week later
- Two-stage silicone impressions and bite registration for Invisalign.

For an Invisalign record taking appointment you should ideally allocate 45 minutes of time. This is important as you (the dental nurse) are the treatment provider and are using this time to build rapport with the patient and deliver a fantastic customer service experience patients will value. You will have also freed up clinical diary time for the dentist, allowing them to concentrate on a higher value treatment.

Involvement

However, your involvement does not end there. Once the patient has had their appliance fitted, they will of

course need oral hygiene instruction, aligner care and dietary advice—all of which I deliver to the patient immediately following the fit appointment.

You do not need a surgery for this, the TCO room and a good set of demonstration aids would be adequate.

By this time, the patient would have met me on several occasions, we would have built a good relationship and my involvement in their care is accepted as being part of the process and experience. As they visit the practice for their wire changes, slenderisation or aligner checks, you are able to maintain the relationship—maybe from assisting chairside or talking to them in the waiting lounge—still delivering an amazing customer service experience. This also allows the patient to view the dental nurse from a totally different perspective, rather than being described as ‘the one with the sucking thing’.

Towards the end of the whole experience, you will be reunited with your patient to discuss retention. I see all Invisalign and Six Month Smiles patients on completion of treatment to take impressions for their chosen retainer option, study models and

final photographs. Patients are also offered copies of their before and after photographs so they can see their transformation. It is a wonderful experience to be involved so directly with patient care and giving somebody their confidence and smile back.

Conclusion

If it was not for the introduction of short-term cosmetic orthodontics in our practice, I question whether my role would have been so successful. Of course since those early days it has blossomed to incorporate so much more of the patient experience within our practice, and its success means that my colleagues are now being encouraged and upskilled in order to give even more consistency and flexibility to the system, providing them with fantastic personal development.

I was not content to stop there though; ultimately I would like to see more dental nurses delivering this same experience. My vision is an increase in nurse-led clinics, which is why I now teach advanced impression-taking and record-taking techniques across the UK. Nurses are amazing at delivering patient care and communication, and slowly our dentists are beginning to realise this too. DN