

# ‘I certainly see in most practices there being a real mix of experience and skill sets which could be a positive factor for patients’



BDJ In Practice spoke to **Lee Catlin**, Head of Recruitment & Retention at Colosseum Dental to gauge his thoughts about the recruitment market, its future and that of the workforce

*In your own words, how would you describe the recruitment market as you see it today?*

Obviously, there continues to be a shortage of NHS dentists in the UK, more prominently in remote locations. The COVID-19 pandemic led to an exodus of professionals from the industry, and also changed people's attitudes to full-time work. This left a huge gap between qualified dentists vs vacancies in the UK, so employers have to go the extra mile to stand-out. Candidate expectations and demands are higher than ever, so recruiters need to pay close attention to their individual needs. As a group with a balanced private/NHS mix, we are able to create attractive packages for clinicians which support their long-term career goals. This is not just a great financial package but market leading development for all our associates through our CDUK academy.

*Has retention of staff taken on a greater importance given widely-reported problems in recruiting?*

Absolutely, but retention has always been a critical area of focus for Colosseum Dental. We invest heavily in workplace culture management. It's important that our practice teams work well together and it can take time to establish a collaborative team that 'gels'. When someone leaves it can be very disruptive; like removing a block from a Jenga tower. We partake in the Great Place to Work survey every year, so that we can monitor workplace culture and 'happiness at work'. This gives us verified and reliable feedback from all colleagues – from this, we can build retention strategies and action plans to actively lower staff churn. We have achieved Great Place to Work certification over the last three years. Of course, the certification is important, but what's more valuable is the decision-making process that the survey itself informs. I also think that flexibility, as an employer, is really important. This isn't just about flexible working terms, it's also about enabling career route exploration, training and providing an attractive choice of NHS/private income mix for our associates.

*Are there any patterns you see developing more than others – increase in part time, for example?*

We have seen an increase in requests for part time working. However, enabling this is also a key part of our retention strategy. If a clinician chooses to work part time, that presents us with an opportunity to bring in more talent and an additional set of skills. We've also noticed an increase in applications from non-UK dentists. We have a fantastic overseas dentist programme which has been hugely successful giving them a structured mentoring programme as well as opportunities to develop into more advanced dentistry at a relatively early stage of their career. Lastly, we have really encouraged skillmix in our practices utilising therapists to great success and have certainly seen a high level of applications over the last few years.

*Are you seeing the much-discussed move from NHS to private dentistry, and if so what impact will it have?*



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We are, but because we offer a mix of NHS and private, our dentists get to enjoy the best of both worlds. NHS dentistry offers great stability and experience (this is particularly appealing to early-career dentists). There've been a handful of situations recently where our clinicians have returned to offering NHS dental care after a short stint of 'private only' – acknowledging that it's great for secure and stable income. The future impact of this could see more experienced clinicians moving out of the NHS but I feel that mixed practices like ours can offer the opportunity to have a great mix of patients in the diary including working on more advanced private treatments.

#### *How has Colosseum attempted to navigate these issues you mention?*

For us, it's all about bespoke development plans and investing in the individual needs of each associate. It's becoming increasingly difficult to stand-out in a market where everyone's fighting over the best clinicians.

And typically, salary and UDAs can be matched from one employer to the next, so our focus is on added value; personalised career development plans, world-class training, access to the best equipment and technology and the promise of a happy, collaborative workplace. We really do have the most comprehensive package on the market.

#### *What do you think the workforce of tomorrow will look like?*

I think this depends on how the government chooses to roll the dice on NHS dental care. But other factors, such as technology and sustainability, will also have an impact on how dental businesses operate. For example, as technology evolves, skillsets will need to adjust. Treatment delivery will become more efficient, creating more 'space' and therefore, being able to provide for more patients. I certainly see in most practices there being a real mix of experience and skillsets which could be a positive factor for patients as it opens up more appointment availability. I

think the use of therapists will continue to evolve.

#### *Finally, how do you see the recruitment market developing over the next year?*

The cost-of-living crisis isn't going away any time soon. I expect demand for unessential private treatment will decline slightly, meaning clinicians in some areas of the country will need to rely on NHS practices as their main income. However, for those who don't want to do NHS dentistry, I imagine we'll notice situations where dentists take on alternative careers within dentistry alongside a part time clinical role. I think that overseas dentist recruitment will be a key driver for most dental groups over the next few years as well and supporting newly qualified dentists in to their first roles. Both of which we have a brilliant set up for. ♦

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