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Private Dentistry

Essential reading for private practice development

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On the straight and narrow:

Pure Orthodontics

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How I did it

Monica Reinach takes us on her journey from South Africa to Scotland, before ending up in Chelmsford to open Pure Orthodontics

After qualifying as a dentist in 1992, I decided to further my education and specialise in orthodontics. Having studied at MEDUNSA University in South Africa, I also obtained my MOrth RCS Edin in 1998 following successful completion of the Royal College of Surgeon's exam.

My father's orthodontic practice, in the South African city of Bloemfontein, gave me the ideal platform to begin my professional career. Whilst here, I developed my skills and gained experience before obtaining a work permit and moving to the UK with my husband in 1999.

On arrival in the UK I was employed as an assistant at a Scottish practice. I worked in Scotland for 18 months before taking the decision to relocate 400 miles south, settling in Bishop's Stortford on the northern Essex/Hertfordshire border.

I took great pleasure in being part of a busy NHS practice in Bishop's Stortford where I became an expense-sharing associate. This set up enabled me to benefit from divided costs, although my dream was always to one day own my own premises.

The only way is private

I was conscious of the constraints suffered by the NHS at the time. I understood opening a new orthodontic practice would mean it would have to be entirely private, as it was unlikely I would obtain an NHS contract. Although I found this a daunting prospect that meant having to leave my comfort zone in Bishop's Stortford, I rose to the challenge and went on my own!

The first big step was finding the ideal location to run a private practice that could survive with no support from an NHS contract.

Having discovered Chelmsford, I immediately fell in love. The location was also ideal in that it was far enough away from Bishop's Stortford to not cause a conflict of interest.

My husband and I started looking for possible premises and came across a beautiful Victorian house that we could have converted into a surgery.

We applied for a change of use on the property in May 2008. Unfortunately, due to a housing shortage, our



Opposite page: The use of glass keeps the practice looking clean and clinical

Left and below: The reception area at Pure Orthodontics. The curved, glass cubicle houses the treatment co-ordinator's room



application was turned down by Chelmsford Council, which was unwilling to change the use to a D1 status.

With this slight setback, it now meant we needed to continue our search to find the right property from which we could commence trading.

A new search

It was my husband's idea to begin looking at Chelmsford's business parks. We viewed the premises (from which I now trade) and instantly knew this was the right place. The property had sufficient floor space over two levels; 12 dedicated parking bays and was ideal for converting into a premier orthodontic practice for the surrounding area.

Located close to major roads and on the Chelmsford peripherals meant the practice has good transportation links and is easily accessible.

We made an offer on the building, subject to change of use. Finding an architect was next on the list as we needed preliminary plans to submit with our change of use application.

To help visualise the design we were looking for, we conducted research online by searching for other practices. From the few practices we really liked, we discovered the same architect designed them all. With this recommendation, I contacted Richard Mitzman.

Richard was previously a dentist in Harley Street and, therefore, appreciated the problems and issues that are specific to the dental industry. He also had a good knowledge of current matters (Richard is a well-known authority on preventing cross contamination through surgery design), so he was ideal to design a practice that would comply with HTM 01-05.



PRACTICE FACT FILE

The practice:

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Design matters

The design process, however, was not so simple. We went through approximately 18 different designs before agreeing and settling on a particular style. My preference was the clean and clinical look of all glass for the surgery. Good news followed and six months later, in May 2009, our change of use application was approved and I was able to purchase the building.



Top: The ground floor encompasses the reception area, the treatment co-ordinator's cubicle and a surgery
Middle: Waiting area with refreshment bar and hidden coat hangers; one of the sterilisation areas
Bottom: The X-ray area on first floor; two surgeries hidden behind frosted glass





Left: The upstairs waiting room. Upstairs encompasses two surgeries, X-ray room, sterilisation area and a sink for patients to freshen up

I had decided on the 'Pure' name in December the year before we started the whole process, but I still had to brand the name and decide on colour schemes as well as brochure and stationary designs.

I was fortunate to meet up with Wim van Ryswyk through a mutual friend. Wim had recently relocated from South Africa and used to work with international corporates as a graphic designer and brand developer.

I immediately liked his designs and after he created my logo I asked him to design my practice brochures as well as my advertising and stationary layouts. He then also produced the designs for my initial web pages.

He was immensely helpful in choosing the colour schemes for my reception furniture and he further surprised me when he presented us with graphic prints he designed that I could use for my practice décor.

Credit rating

Having found the ideal premises, another stumbling block had to be overcome when attempting to finance the whole project. Being caught in the middle of an economic downturn and not having an NHS contract to back me up made this process very difficult.

I was refused credit by Barclays and so decided to get help from my accountant. Together we compiled a business plan outlining the projected income and expenses over the coming three-year period. I presented this information to the Royal Bank of Scotland who reviewed my application and approved credit.

Laying the foundations

We waited several months for the final plans to be put together by our architect. On receipt of these plans, my

husband, who was project manager, started building work at the site the week before Christmas 2009.

Although the premises were situated in an ideal location, the plans called for a radical change to the interior to lose the standard office block look.

Firstly, the square acoustic ceiling tiles had to be taken out and replaced with a smooth ceiling, which called for a total redesign of ceiling lights and air-conditioning positions. Secondly, the raised flooring had to be strengthened to ensure it was rigid enough for tiling. As this floor was going to be permanent, all electrical, plumbing, waste, suction, air and networking had to be carefully planned and we had to ensure we future proofed for any possible changes later.

We also planned to open up the staircase to make the ground and first floor feel as one unit. These were previously divided for two separate businesses. Our mechanical and electrical consultants also introduced an additional air recovery and refreshing system to compliment the air conditioning system. As this was not compulsory at that time, they showed their foresight as this now ensures that the airflow in the surgeries complies with current and future legislation.

A glass bottleneck

A major bottleneck in the whole planning process was the glass cubicle and surgery doors. Although everything was carefully planned, with a lot of input from our quantity surveyors, this part of the contract was always going to be difficult as the final measurements for the glass sizes could only be confirmed once the floor base and ceiling levels were completed. This then had to be manufactured and fitted before the final floor finishes (tiles and rubber) could be completed.



Left: Two of the three surgeries at Pure Orthodontics, located on the first floor. All surgeries are state-of-the-art, colour co-ordinated and hidden behind frosted glass

When the first glass panels arrived on site it was discovered that the diameter of the cubicle was wrongly calculated by the glass designers and some serious negotiations followed to ensure the projects remained on schedule. The glass staircase also proved to be a headache and almost every glass panel was replaced with some replaced twice.

In the end, this put the project some two weeks behind and made for some interesting juggling as computers, X-ray machines and dental chairs were being installed while the tillers and glass installers were being asked to keep their cutting and dust making to a minimum. Only then could we move in the cabinetry and start final decorations. At this stage my husband and his team had to do some 20 hour-long workdays!

Teaming up

The newly appointed staff had to be told to wear old clothes to work as we decided to start their training regardless. Luckily, our estate agency neighbours could provide toilets for the week, as our plumbing could not be connected until our tillers finished their part.

Within four months all building work was complete and the new practice opened in April 2010. Alongside me, Pure Orthodontics opened its doors with one full-time receptionist and a part-time nurse. Both newly recruited employees were new to dentistry and so we all started together.

I also arranged for a new computer system to be installed, which was a steep learning curve for us all.

Now, one year on, my team has doubled in size. I now employ two full-time and two part-time staff, consisting of a practice manager, two nurses and a receptionist. They make up a wonderful team and everyone at Pure Orthodontics works extremely hard for each client that walks through our door. My team is proactive and is always willing to share new ideas.

Promotion

Being a private practice, I needed to set the bar much higher than other practices in the surrounding area. Excellent customer service is vital for client retention and a great way of advertising the business through word of mouth. This is why we aim to ensure every single patient we see leaves happy.

We keep a record of all referrals we receive and where they were generated. If a referral comes from a patient currently receiving treatment, we reward them with Marks and Spencer vouchers as a thank you gesture. We also have company branded merchandise including pens, lip balm and relief wax that we give to our patients.

We have tried various ways of advertising to promote the practice. We also have a fully functioning website and have created a company page on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. It's amazing the number of patients that have come directly to us through these sources. We also have a 'practice blog' that we use to update clients on everything we are doing.

In the past year we have held, and will continue to hold, open days and lecture evenings. This gives other dentists

and their staff the opportunity to come and see the practice. My hope is that by promoting the practice in this way, more of the dentists are willing to refer patients to Pure Orthodontics. During January, we offered a 10% discount voucher as an incentive to increase company sales.

We offer new patients a free one-hour consultation. We also offer in-house and outside finance and discounts if paid in full. Every initial consultation is followed up within one week, giving the patient sufficient time to reflect and offering our assistance if they decide to proceed with treatment.

Pure Orthodontics uses the latest technology and state-of-the-art equipment. Every brace is custom-made specifically for each individual patient. This helps us to be more efficient and reduce treatment times, benefiting in increased profitability for the company. It also makes it possible for the referring dentist to be more involved and have a greater say with regards to the treatment planning.

I see a bright future for Pure Orthodontics. I believe the next step is to become more involved with local schools, highlighting the benefits of oral hygiene. I am also in the process of creating a position for a full-time marketing manager.

Every day brings a new challenge, but we have developed a great team and are ready to face these head on and look forward to a successful future for Pure Orthodontics. **PD**

COMPANIES INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

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