

Introducing skill mix: Top Tips

- The following tips are based on feedback from a range of different practices who have been working with the dental contract reform programme.
- The aim is to help you consider skill mix in your practice to more effectively deal with your patients needs.
- Not all the tips are likely to be applicable to every practice: you will need to consider which ones are relevant to your practice.

The tips are divided into three groups. First identify the likely benefit of introducing skill mix to your practice before considering the steps you need to take.

Establishing need/benefit

- Patient profile
- Appointment book pressures
- Practice development

Practical considerations

- Surgery space
- Appointment book structure
- Recruitment

Integration into the practice

- Existing performers
- Team awareness
- Patient communications

Establishing need 1: Patient profile

Some patient groups may benefit more than others...

- Factors that indicate there may be a benefit of introducing therapists to a practice include:
 - High levels of red perio patients
 - Large numbers of children

What do your patients think?

- Evaluate existing feedback received from patients
- Ask patients for their thoughts – incorporate questions into existing feedback

Establishing need 2: Appointment book pressures

Skill mix can ease pressure on appointment books

- Therapists can see complex perio patients and children
- Hygienists can see IC appointments including scale and polish
- EDDNs can take over many IC appointments

Freeing up dentist time can provide more time to see new patients

- One session each week provides availability for over 400 new patients per year

More time available for treatment appointments

- Overall practice appointment efficiency is improved and patient satisfaction increased

Establishing need 3: Practice development

Extending the dental team offers development opportunities to the practice

- Improved recruitment potential through the provision of wider career opportunities
- Opportunities for internal staff progression

Potential to widen treatment options and services offered at the practice

- More time may be freed up for dentists to further specialise – e.g. implantology, minor oral surgery etc

Practical considerations 1: The practice

What space is
really
available?

- Consider making use of existing surgeries in mornings/afternoons/evenings/weekends
- Run OHE clinics staffed by suitably qualified EDDNs when dentists/therapists are on holiday

Appointment
book
structure

- EDDNs can complete elements of the OHA/R that a dentist does not need to – ie medical & social history questionnaires / delivering oral health messages
- Appointment lengths with the extended team should be agreed through discussion with the whole clinical team

Practical considerations 2: Recruitment

Where do you go to recruit?

- Speak to your LDC about opportunities locally
- Do you have a therapist training school in the local area? This can be a good place to get advice on the current market place
- Consider in house training for EDDNs

The package

- Offer a competitive package
- Part time options could be considered
- How will you fund the post? Referral fees, management charge, no cost to performers are all options to consider.

Integration into the practice 1: Performers

Be realistic – it can take time to successfully implement a change to skill mix

- Ensure all performers are aware of the scope of practice of therapists, hygienists & EDDNs
- Explain the benefits to the patients, the practice and the team
- Setting aside time for communication is key

Use real examples to demonstrate the effect skill mix can have

- Using an existing diary, identify all the patients that could be seen by another team member and the annualised impact that could have
- Undertake this exercise as a group and at individual performer 1:1s

Integration into the practice 2: Team awareness

Invest time in the whole team

- All the team should be clear about the benefits of the introduction of new roles
- A consistent message throughout the practice will underline the importance of the role, just as it does the benefits of the pathway approach

Integration into the practice 3: Patients

Patient attitude to skill mix can vary

- Practices have found that the way in which patients respond to the introduction of 'non dentist' appointments varies
- Produce leaflets explaining the roles and competencies
- Consider referring to appointments with a member of 'the clinical team' rather than a specific job role

Communicate,
communicate,
communicate

- With more team members involved in a patients care, continuity may be an issue. Consider keeping patients in touch with the practice as a whole via newsletters.