

Sustainable compassionate care

A look at how one practice stepped up its game during the pandemic.



Dentist Niket Patel believes that as patients have become more nervous due to the pandemic, the practice team have to offer reassurance that everything is in place to ensure they are as safe as possible. It is an approach that offers his patients the confidence to feel they are well looked after, and it is one he supports not only with an investment in his own professional development, but also through his commitment to dentistry beyond the four walls of his surgery.

An impassioned general dental practitioner with a belief in the one simple principle of 'a smile for life', he supports his clinical excellence

and empathetic patient care with a matching enthusiasm for the politics of the profession, too.

Busy steering his team at Smile Essential in Leicester, Niket is also an executive member of the Leicestershire Local Dental Committee (LDC). It is a role he evidently values as much as he does the job of delivering care to his patients. In fact, he believes one supports the other, which makes his participation important to dentistry at every level.

As he explains, "As part of the LDC, I am able to help my fellow colleagues, and as part of a committee, I can influence local decision-makers to

ensure they understand the needs and concerns of Leicester GPs and our patients."

Like many cities, Leicester comes with its own unique set of problems regarding dental care. This was compounded by a pandemic that was not kind to patient access.

Throughout those early months of lockdown, Niket (as part of the LDC team) worked with NHS England, Public Health England and the British Dental Association to maintain continuity of service whilst ensuring it was delivered in a Covid-19-safe environment. And this desire of wanting the best for patients is reflected at Smile Essential, too, where compassionate care offers a gateway to those patients for whom dentistry was put on hold.



Looking back, Niket observes, "Throughout the pandemic, we endeavoured to maintain our personal service for all of our patients during the more difficult times. We kept our patients updated via our website and social media platforms, informing them that we were here to help and that we would try our utmost to help solve any dental issues that may have arisen. Our team has always taken the time to get to know patients personally and listen to their wishes; good communication is imperative in this. With Covid-19 to contend with, we now speak to every patient the day before their appointment. We explain the procedure, what will happen at the appointment and talk them through the new arrangements. They are briefed on what to do on arrival at the practice, as well as what they can expect to see, such as the team wearing full PPE. We also explain that we are unable to see as many patients as we did prior to Covid-19 as we are required to allow extra time for the surgeries to be deep cleaned after each patient. We risk assess all patients for Covid-19 symptoms prior, and on arrival, to their appointments."

To ensure excellent patient journey outcomes, Niket is also a firm believer in the power of a team. "Working together is paramount to ensure a consistent patient journey and a happy team. Given that our smiles and expressions are hidden behind masks, positive body language is a key part of this now. Our team will go the extra



mile to ensure every patient has the best dental experience they can."

This compassionate care goes beyond this empathetic staff approach. The messaging on social media platforms, such as the practice's Instagram page, also reflects the practice ethos.

"We utilised Instagram during recent months to convey key messages about the team, so patients had insight before they came through the door. Social media has been very important to ensure details about the team were conveyed," he says.

And the practice environment also facilitates this. "Our practice is an oasis of tranquillity. We have scented candles, calming music, satellite TV in our patient lounge and music is streamed through Spotify. We have DVDs available in our treatment rooms, so patients feel relaxed and calm during treatment."

Patients are treated in a Belmont treatment centre that also fits in with the practice ethos of making the patient journey as comfortable and relaxed as possible.

Niket explains, "We have been using Belmont equipment for many years now. It is very reliable and comfortable and has served us well, so we would not change this."

The practice is dental phobia

certified, which can be an attraction for the more nervous patient, particularly significant in the current climate. "We use The Wand, which is a painless injection system, so patients do not know or feel that they have had an injection. It was very important to implement it into the treatment and care of our patients, especially with our more nervous patients. It is a brilliant piece of equipment."

With the changes in equipment, materials and knowledge of dentistry, the profession was quick to adapt to the global upheaval that brought about huge changes for every clinician, and Niket remains passionate about the dentistry he is able to deliver. Indeed, he is as enthusiastic about the technology and the team that help to support this compassionate care as he is the knowledge and skills he possesses to transform people's smiles. As one of the practice's Instagram post reveals, "Creating beautiful confident smiles takes a whole team of people. We love what we do and are forever grateful for the dedication and commitment from our whole team to provide excellent dentistry and world-class customer care."

And seemingly, not even a pandemic can dampen this spirit.