Are you up to speed on equality?

Glenys Bridges provides some advice on the code of equality

Alongside the professional requirements set out by the General Dental Council, dental professionals must make sure their day-to-day activities meet generic legal requirements. There has always been a considerable overlap between the professional legal requirements, now Care Quality Commission’s mandate is to blend these factors into a joined-up code of practice for providers of health and social care. To fulfill this role they must ensure timely integration of new legal requirements into practices working procedures. Therefore, practices cannot afford to overlook new legislation or fail to make any required changes.

Some new legal codes will have a minimal impact of dental teams. Others will be more significant. One significant change was introduced with the new Equality Act which was introduced on October 1, 2010. Under this Act all employers and providers of goods or services to the public need to be aware of some significant changes.

The Act was introduced to streamline and combine previous legislation and make things easier for businesses. Its objective is to help protect minority groups and those who are discriminated against, which is unarguably good society as a whole, but reality places increased pressures on care service providers.

Key changes
The Act specifies ‘Protected Characteristics’ and types of discrimination:

Protected Characteristics
Age; disability; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity.

Different types of discrimination:
Direct discrimination; Associative discrimination; indirect discrimination; Harassment; Harassment by a third party; Victimisation; Discrimination by perception.

The response to these changes must be to actively promote equality, diversity and human rights. On this basis you can plan actions to cater for patients with specific needs, including those with disabilities.

You will need to Introduce practice processes to receive patient feedback and act on it, so that patient wants and needs are accounted for when shaping your services.

Practice managers need to determine practical ways to introduce and monitor both existing and updated measures into their practices. The most effective way to roll out the practices best intentions is to involve all staff in setting and measuring the observation of standards. In most cases this requires some training and development for the team.