Get the right advice

As the work involved in obtaining or maintaining an NHS dental contract increases, the role of dental accountants in supporting dental practices is expanding, says Caroline Holland

Paul Kendall, National Association of Specialist Dental Accountants (NASDA) founder, was asked by one of his dentist clients for help in achieving an uplift to her PCT contract. She was worried she would be railroaded into accepting the contract in its initial form and wanted him to join her for a meeting with the PCT.

He explains: “The client had no idea how to negotiate and felt out of her depth. I was happy to support her at the meeting because I see it as being part of the overall relationship, to get involved with management issues.”

“Initially, the PCT did not react favourably to my presence but, as the meeting progressed, realised I was acting in my client’s best interests. I was able to point out that they were over-looking a period of maternity leave, which had deflated her income, which they were using to base her contract on.

“Obviously there was a charge for attending the meeting, but the client thought it was good value because I helped secure an uplift in the UDA value. Now she consults us on a range of management issues.”

A similar experience

Bob Cummings, NASDA’s specialist tax adviser, had a similar experience when he supported an orthodontist who was meeting her PCT to bid for a new orthodontic contract. The specialist wanted Bob there to explain the figures and justify the UOA rate.

Bob said afterwards: “I think it gave the client confidence to have me there and the PCT welcomed my input.” Once again, there was a happy client who had no hesitation in paying for their accountant at their side.

Good preparation

Johnny Minford of Minford Chartered Accountants has been helping clients with procurement. In his view, the accountant’s training is good preparation for the demands of securing an NHS contract from a PCT, whether it’s the pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ), which gets your name on the shortlist, or the Memorandum of Information.

“For every PQQ put in, a high percentage are thrown out because the detail isn’t there. Answering questions with a “Yes” or “No” answer often won’t do. Dentists need to be canny and then be able to read between the lines so they can couch everything in the right words. Because NASDA accountants are dental specialists, we are able to help dental practices understand what is required and jump through the hoops. We also understand the economics of the situation.”

Alan Suggett of UNW also strongly believes that accountancy is about more than compliance work. As a member of NASDA’s technical committee, he carries out the quarterly survey of good will values and helps clients with valuations and buying and selling.

He recalls attending a meeting with a client who wanted to incorporate. He was there to explain the implications and as a result, the PCT gave its blessing to the change in the dentist’s business status.

He concludes: “I anticipate that this trend will continue because so much is now expected of dental practices and they need to have the right advice at the right time. If the PCT is committed to access for local people, it should be ready to work with dentists’ representatives to make sure everyone involved in dental provision is satisfied with the contracting process.”

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DTUK2509_17_NASDA 06.10.2009 17:23 Uhr Seite 1

DTUK2509_17_NASDA 06.10.2009 17:23 Uhr Seite 1

DTUK2509_17_NASDA 06.10.2009 17:23 Uhr Seite 1

DTUK2509_17_NASDA 06.10.2009 17:23 Uhr Seite 1

DTUK2509_17_NASDA 06.10.2009 17:23 Uhr Seite 1

DTUK2509_17_NASDA 06.10.2009 17:23 Uhr Seite 1