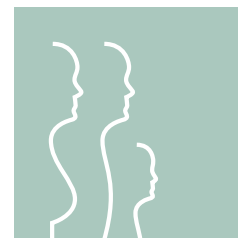


Dental practices have a responsibility towards the environment – an article by Allan Weiner in The Dentist.



CareCapital

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finance

## Build green

Dental practices have a responsibility towards the environment, says **Allan Weiner**.

**G**lobalisation is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and one of its effects has been to revolutionise the concept of social responsibility. While the UK dental industry cannot be expected to exert a major influence on the economic welfare of entire overseas populations, in the areas of climate change and the husbanding of natural resources, we can at least make a small contribution, and perhaps set an example to others.

Historically, most dental practices were situated in the high street. This was the natural location for delivering non-residential, community-oriented healthcare intended to benefit a population that lacked the mobility that patients enjoy today. The legacy

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of these high street practices remains with us, most of them representing conversions from domestic or other uses. These premises continue to house dental businesses, both in the NHS and private practice. Many of these buildings date back to Victorian times, but in the past two decades custom built clinics and other facilities, often incorporating a range of healthcare disciplines, are becoming the norm.



● Although not everyone is into 'saving the planet', it is the little things, such as switching off lights after use, that count.



**Allan Weiner**  
is executive director of  
CareCapital.

### New build

While 'green' energy savings and other environmentally friendly measures can be applied to any type of premises, it is in the area of

new build that the most dramatic impact can be achieved. Purpose built surgeries involve a considerable capital investment, usually beyond the scope of individual practitioners ➔

## finance

Cor even the local PCT. This is why specialist healthcare providers, such as CareCapital, develop and lease back the completed project to 'partner' tenants on a long-term basis. CareCapital is particularly concerned that its developments address the green agenda at every opportunity, and both its existing and new medical and dental facilities save as much energy as is compatible with their efficiency and suitability for purpose.

Typical design and architectural considerations involve maximising the use of natural light, insulation, double glazing and opting for materials and building methods that reduce energy demands during the course of construction. Designs incorporating sun tubes are a relatively modern concept and particularly apt in low rise or twin storey developments, while open plan reception areas encourage ventilation in summer and disseminate heat widely in the colder months.

In suitable locations, solar panels or wind turbines may provide a proportion of a practice's electricity requirements, and it is worth remembering that grants are sometimes available for existing businesses towards the cost of installing devices that exploit renewable energy sources. However, although these devices, once installed, reduce energy overheads for the indefinite future, the capital outlay involved may not be justified in every case and principal dentists are advised to do their sums carefully! Fortunately, there are many other ways to slim down a practice's carbon footprint that do not require radical structural alterations or major financial investment.

#### Imagination and enthusiasm

Perhaps the most important factors in developing a 'green' practice are the imagination and enthusiasm of the practice staff. Not everyone is inspired to 'save the planet', but experience has proved that the easiest and most

obvious courses of action, where the benefits are immediately apparent, are the ones most likely to be followed through.

Chief among these is switching off lights and electrical appliances when they are not in use. Research demonstrates that up to a fifth of the power consumption in some practices is simply wasted when unattended computers are left running or lights are on for unnecessarily long periods. Savings in energy use will be complemented by cost savings in the form of lower bills. Keeping staff switched on to a switch-it-off policy has all round benefits.

Where continuous lighting is required, low energy bulbs are the solution. Devising systems that automatically switch themselves

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off after a period of inactivity, and not leaving units on standby with their tell tale lights glowing, also saves a surprising amount of energy. In response to changing public attitudes, and the fact that a single television set left on standby overnight adds approximately £30 to an annual electricity bill, some manufacturers are already beginning to omit this feature from their products. There has even been a recent suggestion that legislation may be employed to outlaw the standby feature altogether.

Energy savings need not be confined to a clinic's premises. Where practicable, staff can be encouraged to cycle to work rather than drive, to car share or to use our much maligned public transport system, saving energy and carbon dioxide emissions, too. Healthier and more energetic staff members may be a bonus result!

#### Recycling

The flip side of the green coin is recycling. There is as yet no universal recycling policy covering all UK local authorities, and dental waste is normally classified as non-domestic. Therefore, its collection and disposal incurs varying levels of charges. However, the pressure is on from central Government to encourage increased recycling volumes to meet confirmed national and EU targets, and all local councils offer facilities of some kind.

Paper, glass, metals and plastic are widely accepted for recycling, but there are other, specialist products that have similar potential.

The genuinely green practice will arrange the delivery of redundant equipment and furniture to the local recycling depot and despatch items, such as empty printer cartridges, to the appropriate destination. Battery recycling bins have also made an appearance in some areas.

Informing the patients via a wall poster, for example, that the practice is taking what steps it can to help the environment is a good public relations exercise and it may also provoke suggestions for further green measures.

The one certainty in the green debate is that it is here to stay. Every dental practice, of whatever type and wherever it is located, can make a contribution. From using recycled paper to fitting a new skylight, there are endless possibilities - to quote the ancient adage, 'from little acorns mighty oak trees grow.' It is always worth remembering that, however environmentally sensitive the builder and developer of a new facility may be, it is the occupier and user of the premises whose 'green' attitude will make it work. ■

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