



# A helping hand

We all need a helping hand at times. Here, general dentist **Jamie Farquharson** and endodontist **Trevor Lamb** discuss the virtuous triangle of the referring relationship

The words 'single-handed' when applied to a dentist conjure up images of a neat, orderly life, a practice with one surgery, a receptionist/nurse and a part-time hygienist.

In other words: minimal potential for conflict or complexity.

But those who are single-handed know that in the absence of peer support, there is potential for isolation. Indeed, the very nature of the way dentists treat patients means they regularly make decisions about treatment, and carry this out on their own.

This applies to dentists working single-handed or in multi-surgery practices. If things don't go to plan, as can often happen, there is a real sense of isolation for the dentist, and the repercussions can be far-reaching.

But how can this be minimised? One suggestion is to make the most of intelligent referring to trusted colleagues, thereby creating a virtuous circle (or more accurately a triangle) in the interests of the patient.

*Private Dentistry* talks to two Harley Street dentists – generalist Jamie Farquharson and endodontic specialist Trevor Lamb – to gain some insight into how they benefit from this relationship.

## Jamie's view

'I used to do endo myself for many years and got some good results,

struggled with challenging cases and found this to be quite stressful. I decided to refer patients to the Harley Street Centre for Endodontics (HSCE) when I saw what good results they were achieving on a consistent basis, including complex cases.

'I realised that there was a financial loss to my practice in doing so, but felt that the benefits to my patients outweighed this. I strongly believe that referring a patient for specialist treatment is a good thing, if it is in the patient's best interest. This applies to other specialties such as orthodontics, paedodontics, hygienists etc. For me, the patients' interests have always been my main concern.

'Over the years, I have attended many courses – including Rosenthal and Las Vegas Institute of Advanced Dental Studies – and have since developed a minimally invasive approach to dentistry. Referring patients for endodontic treatment complements this philosophy and enables me to continue to achieve high clinical standards.

'It is somewhat naive or perhaps hopeful for us general dentists to think we can achieve the same results as a specialist dentist. Financial pressures shouldn't make us "have a go".

'Visiting the HSCE and seeing the

## Trevor Lamb

Trevor has worked as Julian Webber's colleague at the Harley Street Centre for Endodontics almost since the clinic opened 11 years ago. He received his BDS in 1982 from the University of the Witwatersrand and his postgraduate endodontic training from the Medical University of Southern Africa (Cum Laude). He has 26 years' experience in the speciality of endodontics and an additional endodontic qualification from the College of Medicine (SA). A fellow of the International College of Dentists, Trevor is also an accredited member of the American Association of Endodontists.

cutting-edge equipment, microscopes and facilities in part explains why the results achieved are so good. Additionally, Trevor and Julian Webber are hugely experienced with a wealth of knowledge and expertise. The result is consistently high success rates (95%) in a state-of-the-art practice that thoroughly impresses all patients. The HSCE is very well organised with efficient and friendly staff. In my opinion, it is head and shoulders above the rest.

'If someone else can achieve such good results, why wouldn't you refer to them? Endodontics is evolving fast, and this is being driven by advances in technology – this is very different to 30 years ago!

'Trevor and I discuss every patient being referred, and I will receive a completed report of the treatment he has carried out on my patient. He may advise me on the recommended restorative treatment and we will discuss options and review each other's work – it is an informal peer review and very useful. If I am not sure about the source of a problem, I can always get Trevor's opinion and it's a problem shared.'

### Trevor's view

'I would say that we have a special relationship with all our referrers! The relationship between dentist and referrer is an interesting one and very different from the dentist-patient relationship.

'Patients do not have the knowledge to assess their dentist's clinical skills, so their choice of dentist is usually an emotional one. Do they like the person, the team, or the location? It could be a whole host of factors. Meanwhile, a dentist usually chooses a specialist for their clinical skills.

'When patients are referred to a specialist chosen by their dentist, but of whom they have no knowledge or experience, the trust they have in their dentist is delegated to the specialist.

'As a specialist, you never get to know the patient that well. Our role is not to develop our relationship with the patient, but maintain continuity for the referring dentist.

The challenge is not the clinical care, but managing a patient of whom you have no previous experience. The dentist has had many years of learning to manage the patient; we have to get it right in one or two visits.

'Jamie is typical of our referring dentists in that we have no problem contacting him – or he us – to discuss a case. The kind of things that come up in our conversation would be the prognosis of the tooth that he wants to be saved, how best to treat and then how best to restore. We will normally advise against a post since this can often weaken a tooth rather than strengthen it. Most root-treated teeth should have full coverage.

'Inevitably, if the root treatment fails, it will be the endodontist who is blamed, not the dentist. We rarely turn down a referral – but we would discuss the restorative options with the referring dentist prior to undertaking the treatment. Why? It is widely documented that a well-fitted coronal restoration is a major determinant in the outcome of any endodontic procedure.

'Our position here is that all dentists should be able to do all treatments within their ability, but we also respect those colleagues, like Jamie, who believe that complex treatments are best carried out by specialists.

'Specialists and dentists have to work closely together and if the relationship isn't based on mutual trust and respect, then the patient's interests are not being served. Being able to call the patient's dentist and have a full and frank discussion about the best way to proceed is hugely important.' PD

### Jamie Farquharson

Jamie practises on London's Harley Street, and has worked in the West End for 30 years. He is single-handed and works with a hygienist. He knew Julian Webber briefly at Guy's and his practice used to be in the same building as the Harley Street Centre for Endodontics. This was when his referring relationship with endodontists Julian and Trevor Lamb began.

